

IN THE SHADOW OF HIS LANGUAGE

By Jacob Juntunen

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In the Shadow of his Language was a Semi-finalist for the O'Neill Center National Playwrights' Conference; semi-finalist for the Princess Grace Playwriting Fellowship; finalist for the Alliance/Kendeda National Graduate Playwriting Award; Awarded an "In the Works" residency by the city of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events.

In the Shadow of his Language has had readings at Chicago Dramatists, the Chicago DCASE Cultural Center, the Alliance Theatre, and Playwrights Horizons.

For Meghann

CHARACTERS

DIDI O'CONNOR: A young woman with a working-class, South Boston accent. 18 in Act I; 21 in Act II.

RICHARD COSGRAVE: A man in his thirties with an RP UK accent.

VIRGIL: A man in his early 60s with a standard U.S. accent.

MATT COHEN: A young man with a standard U.S. accent. 18 in Act I; 21 in Act II.

MADISON: A young woman with a Northern California accent. 18.

KELLI: A young woman with a working-class, Schenectady, NY accent. 20s. Played by the same actor who plays Madison.

MR. O'CONNOR: Didi's father. A working-class, South Boston accent. 40s.

MRS. O'CONNOR: Didi's mother. A working-class, South Boston accent. 40s.

GRACE QUINCY: A woman with in her 40s or 50s. Boston Brahmin accent. Played by the same actor who plays Mrs. O'Connor.

SETTING

There are many locations that will best be served by a neutral space that allows the words to create the details. Whatever it is should be impressionistic and permit the action to move quickly without blackouts.

“And if only we arrange our life according to that principle which counsels us that we must always hold to the difficult, then that which now still seems to us the most alien will become what we most trust and find most faithful.”

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*. Eighth letter.

“His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.”

—James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Act I

Scene 1:

The front steps of a South Boston walk-up apartment building on a warm spring night. DIDI and MR. O'CONNOR enter carrying paper cups; MR. O'CONNOR also carries a bottle in a paper bag. They both speak with working class, South Boston accents.

DIDI

Let's not go in yet, Dad.

MR. O'CONNOR

Whatever my white swan wants tonight; you gotta have another swig of this.

DIDI

I already got the spins.

MR. O'CONNOR pours whiskey in his cup.

MR. O'CONNOR

Like those girls with them feathers twirlin'?

MR. O'CONNOR attempts a spin.

DIDI

A pirouette.

MR. O'CONNOR

You's too smart for all those colleges. Your application probably scared 'em off.

DIDI

South Boston transcripts probably scared 'em off—

MR. O'CONNOR

You ain't still pissed that I only afforded application fees for five schools?

DIDI

I shoulda applied for a safety, but my scores were fucking awesome. Mrs. Brock said—

MR. O'CONNOR

Mrs. Brock, Mrs. Brock— If it wasn't for that old badger you never would'a got these fucking ideas.

DIDI

I wanna spin that globe you got me and plan trips to wherever my finger lands. How am I gonna see anywhere's without going to college?

MR. O'CONNOR

Join the Army or some'tin'. Why didn't you just go to the fucking high school library?

DIDI

No one harasses you leavin' the public library. Mrs. Brock says I can shelve full-time when I graduate. It's only minimum wage, though, you can't travel on—

MR. O'CONNOR

What do you want a go away for?

DIDI

Mrs. Brock calls me Didi Dedalus, says I gotta go forge somet'in' in the smithy of my soul—

MR. O'CONNOR

What the fuck's that mean?

DIDI

It's from a James Joyce novel. This character goes off and becomes an artist. But I ain't all that. Five rejection notices don't lie.

MR. O'CONNOR

Didn't we just make a splash at the ballet? And that girl from University College in Dublin's doing not'in' better with her life than selling lemonade in the Common. You can take Old Badger's place when she goes to her eternal reward.

DIDI

You can't be a librarian without a masters or some shit, but shelving is steady.

MR. O'CONNOR

Brock's an outsider; she don't know you. She shouldn't a put you up to all those SAT training books. Just find yourself a place nearby, come home Sundays, see your sister, that fucking Useless husband she's got, and your niece. You're practically her godmother.

DIDI

But I ain't.

MR. O'CONNOR

You weren't sixteen when she was born, and the Church says—

DIDI

Pegs ain't gonna make me no godmother of her kid. She wanted me dead when I was born.

MR. O'CONNOR

She woulda made you godmother if you'd been confirmed. Godparents gotta instruct the child in the faith. You can't let just anyone do that.

DIDI

Pegs's the one that had to leave school cause she couldn't keep her legs—

MR. O'CONNOR

What about all those scrawny feathered girls jumping tonight?

DIDI

I saw you was crying at the end.

MR. O'CONNOR

Well they fucking jumped in the pond and cashed out!

DIDI

Tough guy.

MR. O'CONNOR

The O'Connors have always been people of words. My father, may he rest in peace—

They cross themselves.

MR. O'CONNOR (cont)

—used to tell stories that would silence the whole pub. And his favorite was—

DIDI and MR. O'CONNOR

Deirdre of the Sorrows.

MR. O'CONNOR

There'd be tears running down every whiskered face when he described Deirdre leaving her father. And so here you are, Didi O'Connor. You got it good. You don't want to go nowhere's.

DIDI

James Joyce left Ireland and never fit in again. They wouldn't even let his body back in the country when he kicked it.

MR. O'CONNOR

You's already a fucking autodidact. You don't need none of us.

DIDI

Who else ever bought me lemonade on the Common? And that music tonight...

She hums the theme from *Swan Lake*.

MR. O'CONNOR

Enough of the fucking Ruskies.

MR. O'CONNOR downs his drink.

MR. O'CONNOR

(Singing) And it's no, nay, never,

DIDI and MR. O'CONNOR clap in time.

MR. O'CONNOR and DIDI

(singing) No nay never no more!
Will I play the wild rover
No never no more!

MRS. O'CONNOR enters. She also speaks
with a working class, South Boston accent.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Where the fuck have you's been?

DIDI

Don't get your knickers in a twist, Ma.

MRS. O'CONNOR

He pisses off Joey over you, comes home gooned, and you tell me not to—

MR. O'CONNOR

Who gives a fuck what fucking Fat-As-A-House says—

MRS. O'CONNOR

Joey fucking called me about ten times tonight wanting to know where the fuck you was—

MR. O'CONNOR

I fucking told him I was taking the night off!

DIDI

I thought you said they didn't need you today?

MR. O'CONNOR

I told fucking Fat-As-A-House I needed the night off to take my little girl to the ballet, and Fat-As-A-House said piss off. Fucking Italians. I ain't been sick in twenty years of parking cars at UMass, so—

DIDI

You took a sick day so's we could go to the ballet?

MR. O'CONNOR

I took a fucking sick day. I deserve one every couple of decades, so Fat-As-A-House can try actually working for a change, parking some of those cars instead of just sitting on his ass—

MRS. O'CONNOR

And I have to deal with his fucking phone calls.

MR. O'CONNOR

I told him the score. Work is what you fucking need, Didi, not some fucking fake-ass bullshit at college. Work is what reveals a man's soul.

DIDI

I ain't a man.

MR. O'CONNOR

You know what I mean.

MRS. O'CONNOR

We know exactly what you mean.

MR. O'CONNOR

You take me, I ain't missed a day in twenty years. Fucking Fat-As-A-House, there, gets pissed at me for tonight, when he takes a fucking vacation every time the weather warms up. That shows what kind of man he is; if his uncle wasn't the boss he wouldn't be no fucking supervisor—

MRS. O'CONNOR

You'd be a fucking supervisor by now if you didn't insult everyone with your fucking nicknames. You think Joey likes being called Fat-As-A-House?

MR. O'CONNOR

We had a nice chat with a university girl from Dublin selling lemonade on the Common, and I didn't insult her at all. Because she was working. A legitimate trade. Testing her mettle. You think that fucking lemonade sells itself? No, she fucking works. Fat-As-A-House ain't nothing but a fucking sycaphant—

DIDI

It ain't so bad I didn't get in nowhere's. That girl's got a degree from Dublin and she ain't doing nothing better than selling fucking lemonade on the—

MRS. O'CONNOR

You probably wanna look at this before you say much more.

MRS. O'CONNOR holds out a 9x12 envelope. DIDI takes it.

DIDI

You opened it.

MRS. O'CONNOR

I thought it was for me.

DIDI

It has a picture of the fucking college on it—

MR. O'CONNOR

I thought you already heard from all them colleges?

DIDI

I did.

MRS. O'CONNOR

I opened one and you was on the waiting list, but I threw it away. Said you was rejected.

MR. O'CONNOR

She was on a fucking waiting list and you didn't fucking tell us?

MRS. O'CONNOR

I didn't want her getting her hopes up.

DIDI reads the contents of the envelope.

DIDI

Fuck me. They want me to come.

MR. O'CONNOR

What the fuck for? You just said that girl from University of Dublin ain't doing nothing better than selling lemonade. You want to fucking go into debt then get some shitty job—

MRS. O'CONNOR

They's giving her a free ride. Look at the financial aid sheet.

DIDI

How the fuck did I get a scholarship off the waiting list?

MRS. O'CONNOR

It's all need-based. They got this formula—

MR. O'CONNOR

We don't gotta pay nothing?

MRS. O'CONNOR

There's a family contribution, but it ain't much, we can figure's it out.

MR. O'CONNOR

How much is "ain't much"?

MRS. O'CONNOR

Eight thousand.

MR. O'CONNOR

That's almost eight months rent!

MRS. O'CONNOR

They got this government loan for Didi, for five thousand, and we gotta borrow three thousand. We just paid off the car.

MR. O'CONNOR

Not so's we could take out a loan for Didi to live the life of Riley—

DIDI

If I go, maybe I could get a masters and take over for Mrs. Brock—

MR. O'CONNOR

You ain't even set foot on campus yet and already you's planning on more debt—

MRS. O'CONNOR

We could swing it, Tom. I can work a little more.

MR. O'CONNOR

Your knees ain't bruised enough from scrubbing floors in Cambridge and Wellesley?

MRS. O'CONNOR

When Pegs and Useless moved in with us after Molly was born, you—

MR. O'CONNOR

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Pegs never asked for a cent—

MRS. O'CONNOR

Pegs and Useless needed a place and we put them up for—

DIDI

This ain't nothing like Pegs's situation; it ain't no fucking tragedy that I got into—

MR. O'CONNOR

You graduating, coming back here, in debt with no job, never learning the value of an honest day's work—that's a fucking tragedy.

DIDI

I'd be working there, just like I been working after school with Mrs. Brock to get into—

MR. O'CONNOR

If we didn't have to take out no loans, it would be different.

DIDI

You always say you was a good enough defensive end to get scouted by a college, but that no one cared about a poor kid from Southie. Well, I made it to the playoffs with my books and got picked up to play college ball. Don't you wanna help me with that?

A beat.

MR. O'CONNOR

One loan, your first year. That's if we even qualify. And you can explain to your sister how you ain't seeing your niece every Sunday no more. She's going to miss you.

DIDI

I'll be home every holiday like clockwork.

MR. O'CONNOR stomps inside.

MRS. O'CONNOR

You's got somet'in', Didi, somet'in' God gave you, and none of us got a right to waste God's gifts.

MRS. O'CONNOR takes off her Celtic cross necklace and puts it on DIDI.

DIDI

I can't take Nan's cross, Ma.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Just don't forget us, Didi O'Connor.

Scene 2:

DIDI is in her college room, unpacking two duffel bags. MADISON enters carrying a large handbag.

MADISON

Roomie!

MADISON drops her bags and throws her arms around DIDI.

DIDI

What the fuck?!

MADISON

What's wrong?

DIDI

You hugged me.

MADISON

You swore.

DIDI

So?

MADISON

I'm Madison. This is super embarrassing, but I totally lost the card they sent with your name on it. I'm like a squirrel when I'm drunk; I put things in safe places, so the housecleaner can't find them, but then I—

DIDI

Didi.

MADISON

Oh my God, that is such a cool name. You don't have your luggage yet either? In California we carry our own bags, but Dad told me it was different out East. He went here before he started Systemic. He says I only got in because I'm a legacy, but he can be kind of a jerk.

DIDI

What's Systemic?

MADISON

The anti-virus software? The little shield thing in your toolbar?

DIDI shrugs.

MADISON (cont)

Anyway, I guess it's important for work study kids to have something to do. But to have other students carry our bags while we just watch? Totally awkward.

DIDI

My Dad lugged this.

MADISON

All the way up the hill? Sweet. My Dad stayed in California. He can't really get away in this economy. And Mom was on a shoot for *Good Housekeeping*. It's not *Vogue*, but it's a cover, so, not bad for her age.

MADISON opens her handbag and faces the audience, as if she looks in a mirror.

MADISON (cont)

I'd let you use some of my lipstick, but our coloring's totally different. Whatever foundation you're using to look that pale really shows off your red hair,¹ though.

DIDI

I ain't wearing nothing.

MADISON

Oh, that's so cool! You're, like, natural? Some guys are totally into that. Still, you need to be careful. Your first year, you've got to be, like, totally perfect for the Kappas and Thetas or you'll end up in Gamma. Mom barely got into Kappa, and she's been on the cover of *Elle*. I wish I wasn't too big for that, but Dad's going to give me a hundred bucks for every pound I lose, so that should keep me motivated. Keep off the first-year fifteen, you know? What frats are you going to?

DIDI

I gotta take the library tour.

¹ If the actor playing Didi doesn't have red hair, change the line. But red is my preference.

MADISON

No, like, tonight, not the stupid orientation.

DIDI

The library's twenty-four hours. I thought the tour might show the best places to study nights—

MADISON

If you've seen one college, you've seen 'em all.

DIDI

I ain't never seen a college.

MADISON

I went to Stanford parties, but it's not like I was getting in there. This is the perfect party school—one with enough academics for plausible deniability.

MADISON takes out her expensive laptop.

MADISON (cont)

At least the internet works. Is your computer here yet?

DIDI

No.

MADISON tosses her computer to DIDI.

MADISON

Hey, good catch! My sister always drops it. Check your e-mail or whatever. Sucks ending up in West Hall. I squirreled that housing card away. Totally forgot to send it back. You, too?

DIDI

I sawr the housing card and thought West sounded cool. You's on the quad this way, you know?

MADISON

What school did you go to?

DIDI

South Boston.

MADISON

South Boston? Public? That's hella cool! You can come to the parties with me like when Matt Damon went to the bars in Cambridge! You know? In that movie?

DIDI

I ain't going to none of your fucking parties.

MADISON

No need to shout.

DIDI

I got in here 'cause a my scores, and I'm gonna—

MADISON

It's not, like, an Ivy here. You can party and still pass—

DIDI

I gotta do better than pass. I gotta get into a library science—

MADISON

Then you need to socialize! Meet the right people! That's how you get into places. I'll totally help you. The guys here are, like, totally hooked up. Like, straight lines to Morgan Stanley, Merrill Lynch, so we'll get dressed up when the delivery boys get here with our stuff and—

DIDI

These two bags is all I got.

MADISON

Your parents are mailing the rest?

DIDI

These are all the clothes I own.

MADISON

Oh my God.

DIDI

But I got some new jeans just before I left home, and a green blouse. I, uh, don't got much to spend, but if you think I need something else, I think there's a Wal-Mart—

MADISON

It's twenty miles outside the village. It's a wasteland out here, we're completely isolated. Anyway, Wal-Mart? What could we get there?

DIDI

Well, there's gotta be a drug store down the hill, I'll pick up some lipstick at least—

MADISON

I think it's better like this. Natural. You're, like, so totally authentic. This is so awesome. We're going to be best friends.

DIDI

Don't you fucking hug me.

Scene 3:

As DIDI changes into her new jeans and green blouse, RICHARD and VIRGIL enter their office through a door that they close

behind them. RICHARD speaks with an RP UK accent; VIRGIL American Standard.

RICHARD

Ignoramuses. Every one of them.

VIRGIL

It's the second week. Is it late enough for a martini?

RICHARD

You've been an extremely unpleasant office mate since you've lived alone.

VIRGIL

Bill dying wasn't my choice.

RICHARD

Of course. Thoughtless of me.

VIRGIL

Nor was sharing my office. If I'd known becoming Emeritus would mean an office invasion of a part-time professor—

RICHARD

Believe me, this situation is equally unpleasant for me—

VIRGIL

Oh, yes? Your partner of twenty years dies and your office is occupied with another man's books?

RICHARD

You have your half of the shelves.

VIRGIL

How thoughtful of you not to take all my space while I was grieving and dealing with funeral preparations. And Bill's family. They never got over that I was once his professor. Albeit ages ago. At least I have Maplethorpe.

RICHARD

I should have photocopied the students' papers and read highlights to you. They're the worst students I've ever encountered here.

VIRGIL

You've only been here five years.

RICHARD

Nevertheless.

VIRGIL

Perhaps you've lost your ability.

RICHARD

If this bloody school gave me more than half a chance, I would really touch them.

VIRGIL

Not allowed anymore, alas. It used to be one of the great perks; they grow younger every year, after all, as we get more and more tired—

DIDI knocks on the closed door.

RICHARD

Enter.

DIDI does so, carrying an ancient backpack and wearing old sneakers. She closes the door behind her.

RICHARD (cont)

Ah, Virgil, here we have a prime example. Door open, please.

DIDI opens the door slightly.

VIRGIL

Oh, let her close it if she wants. I can chaperone.

RICHARD

You would be my last choice.

DIDI

I'm sorry, I'm... The syllabus said your office hours are...?

RICHARD

Try for complete sentences, Miss...?

VIRGIL

Perhaps if you knew their names, you could—

RICHARD

It's the second week.

DIDI

Didi.

RICHARD

How unfortunate. What is the matter, Miss Didi?

DIDI

Oh, no. O'Connor.

RICHARD

Miss O'No? Miss O'Connor? Are you in the witness protection program?

DIDI

I ain't the one who's gotta keep the door open just to talk to a student.

VIRGIL

"A hit, a very palpable hit."

RICHARD

What can I do for you?

DIDI

Well, Professor Cosgrave, I'm in your Modern Brit Lit—

RICHARD

Yes, I recognize your Coach bag and Burberry boots, Miss O'Connor.

DIDI

I got 'em on special the same place you got that blazer.

RICHARD

If you'd like to trade wits, please go to the student cooperative, I have work—

DIDI

There ain't no wits at the Coop,² and, anyways, I got a question about my *Heart of Darkness* paper.

VIRGIL

You start in 1903? What about the nineteenth—

DIDI

I ain't never got an F in my life. I worked hard on that paper.

VIRGIL

Why an Oxford man teaches British literature so perversely, I'll never understand.

RICHARD

Hard work doesn't secure you an A here, as I expect it did at your underprivileged-sob-story public school. Your grades in my classroom are based on what you produce.

² "Coop" rhymes with "loop."

VIRGIL

There's a tutoring center for those who need a little help with their writing, grammar and so forth—

DIDI

There ain't nothing wrong with my fucking grammar.

VIRGIL

No need to be defensive.

DIDI

Pardon my French, but it ain't my grammar—tell me what I did wrong.

RICHARD

Maybe if you'd read the book—

DIDI

I read the fucking book.

RICHARD

Then let's have a summary.

DIDI

There's this guy, Marlowe, who wants to travel the world, but the only way he can do it is with a job. So he leaves home and goes to Africa. The work gives him a chance to find himself, but the other Europeans are lazy bastards. Every step of the way, they make creepy decisions that Marlowe goes along with. Finally, he meets this guy Kurtz who's gone native—

RICHARD

And what does that mean, Miss O'Connor?

DIDI

Kurtz will do anything to get ivory, even leaving his family behind and acting like an African. Marlowe is seduced by Kurtz's voice. Kurtz dies saying, "The horror, the horror" about Africa—

RICHARD

So Marlowe's just a fellow who had to leave home to get a good job?

DIDI

But at the end he says he has his "choice of nightmares." I don't think he fit in anywhere he went, not at home with his family, not abroad doing his work.

RICHARD

Interesting. Let's see what's wrong with your paper.

DIDI hands RICHARD her paper.

RICHARD (cont)

Ah, here we are, Virgil. Listen. Miss O'Connor, let's begin with your thesis. (reading) "Thusly, when Conrad says, 'What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours... Ugly,'"—cited incorrectly—"he is saying that the potential humanity of..." I can't even read the rest.

VIRGIL

Richard, she obviously needs—

RICHARD

Miss O'Connor. This sentence needs to be buried in an unmarked grave at midnight.

DIDI

Well, a student's work must reflect her teacher's skill—

RICHARD

Our two weeks together is the cause of this abortion?

DIDI

If you read it more generously—

RICHARD

I see. It's how I read it. Let's try again. (mocking DIDI's accent) "Thusly, when Conrad says, 'What thrilled you's was just the thought of their humanity—like you's... Ugly,' page thirty-six, he is sayin' that the potential humanity of African Americans scares white authors like himself." (RP British) I don't know where to begin. "Thusly"? Let's start with "Thusly."

DIDI

It's formal.

RICHARD

It's a useless synonym for "thus." You do know what a synonym is, don't you? And Conrad isn't "saying" anything, he's written a novella. Let's translate: "Thus, when Conrad writes—"

DIDI

Why is "thus" okay but "thusly" isn't?

RICHARD

We are fixing your sentence; pay attention: "Thus, when Conrad *writes*," then you quote him, "he is *arguing*"—not "saying"—"that the potential humanity of African Americans..." Well. My dear Miss O'Connor. Really?

DIDI

They're Africans. Not African Americans.

RICHARD

Yes.

DIDI

I saw that before I turned it in, but—

RICHARD

You noticed an error and left it uncorrected—

DIDI

I already printed it, and it costs five cents a page in the library to—

RICHARD

Unacceptable. Kill the trees.

DIDI

Just give it to me, I'll cross out—

RICHARD

It goes on for five pages this way; you'd have to cross out every sentence.

DIDI

Shouldn't I get some credit for writing five pages when the assignment was only to write three?

RICHARD

It *was* lovely of you to create more work for me; I do so love grading wretched papers.

VIRGIL

It's a common first year mistake, dear. More isn't always better. Often the length of the assignment is planned to—

RICHARD

You must learn to be succinct, Miss O'Connor.

DIDI

I can't fail this class.

RICHARD

Of course you can.

DIDI

If I get an F, I lose my financial aid.

RICHARD

Perhaps you'd like to use our office phone to call your parents and have them come pick you up?

VIRGIL

Richard, you're her teacher.

RICHARD

Exactly. I am an underpaid, adjunct instructor, contract renewable yearly, while I put in as much

time as any full professor on committees, advising students, and the rest. I am not Henry Higgins here to fix her accent and save her from her own ignorance.

DIDI

What's wrong with how I talk? It ain't how I write.

RICHARD

Yes, I'm sure the dichotomy between your spoken and written languages creates no problems in your logic.

DIDI

So if I change my accent, you'll pass me?

VIRGIL

He can't ask that of you, dear.

DIDI

You think I like stickin' out here every time I open my mouth? Besides, I gotta keep my financial aid. I ain't going into all this debt unless I can go back home, work at the library, and talk anyways I want.

RICHARD

I assume home is South Boston. You want to return as a librarian?

DIDI

There was this librarian—

RICHARD

—who inspired you, etcetera, etcetera. And your parents are proud of you for being the first to go to college and are looking forward to your return to the neighborhood in a few years when you can help fellow underprivileged etceteras find books in the hallowed halls of Southie's library?

DIDI

Etcetera, etcetera.

RICHARD

If you rework this paper, page by page, line by line, sentence by sentence, clause by clause, and word by word, by Monday, I will consider looking at it again.

DIDI

Instead of the paper due Monday?

RICHARD

In addition to the paper due Monday.

VIRGIL

Do all your students have to rewrite their papers?

RICHARD

Miss O'Connor and I are holding her to a higher standard. Or is that objectionable?

VIRGIL

It's your course. Though I suspect Didi could file a complaint against you, if she wished.

RICHARD

Miss O'Connor?

DIDI

I'm raising the bar.

RICHARD

A very good turn of phrase. Except the word is "bar." Say a sentence for me: I saw a dinosaur soaring in the sky.

DIDI

I sawr a dinosaur saurin' in the sky.

RICHARD

If the language coming out of your mouth doesn't match what's in your head, your writing will always be somewhat schizophrenic, Miss O'Connor.

VIRGIL

Don't listen to him, dear. It's some vestigial British imperialism.

RICHARD

You and Miss O'Connor must have spoken before she came here. Her paper suggests that British imperialism, as represented by Conrad, is nothing but bad. But what deposed the Indian monarchy in favor of the current democracy? What laid the train tracks in Africa, to say nothing of your ancestor's green countryside? What made roads and waterworks? What dug sewers?

DIDI

I'm sure that's exactly what Bobby Sands was thinking as he fucking starved in a British prison.

RICHARD

Quite. You're a clever girl, aren't you?

DIDI

I just want to do my work.

VIRGIL

I think you should read Frantz Fanon if Richard truly believes changing your accent would be beneficial—

RICHARD

I fail to see how Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* applies to Miss O'Connor—are we making a white mask to cover her black skin?

VIRGIL

You want her to give up her native language, don't you?

DIDI

I'll read it.

RICHARD

By all means. Read anything you like. And if you want to be successful, buy the books for this class rather than using library copies. You'll want to be able to make marginalia.

DIDI

I'll work on that.

RICHARD

Meanwhile, you must prepare yourself for a great deal of work if you truly want to return to your community as a librarian. Getting into a Library Science program isn't as easy as you may think. And, currently, your paper is atrocious, and your accent unacceptable. Do you participate in extracurricular activities?

DIDI

I work in the cafeteria.

RICHARD

The best graduate schools will want to see that you're an active member of the university community. Do you play rugby?

DIDI

I never even seen it.

RICHARD

Too bad. The violence would compliment your Irish heritage. Do you care to learn?

DIDI

Did Bobby Sands play?

RICHARD

Would that encourage you to do so?

DIDI

Would it offend you if it did?

VIRIGIL

The women's rugby team here is good, Richard, she can't just—

RICHARD

Well, there must be something intramural where they take anyone—

VIRGIL

There's a cross country team that requires no experience. Bill was on it when he was my student, and I was still young enough then to run with him. The trails around here are truly magnificent.

RICHARD

Acceptable?

DIDI

The Irish had to get good at running, didn't they Professor Cosgrave?

VIRGIL

I'll put you in touch with the coach. You want a ride down the hill, Richard?

RICHARD

Indeed I do. But one more thing. Who's Didi, Miss O'Connor?

DIDI

Um. That's me.

RICHARD

I noticed your paper bore that appellation. But Didi is a poodle, Miss O'Connor, not a university scholar.

Scene 4:

DIDI is at a frat party. MADISON enters.

MADISON

Here you are!

DIDI

You worried I was in some frat boy's room getting date raped?

MADISON

You're hella weird. See that guy? He's a photographer. He interned at *Esquire* this summer, and he's like, "Want to do a shoot with me?" And I'm like, "Not with my thighs," and he's like, "You're the same size as some of the girls who do ads"! Isn't that awesome? I'm going to his place to look at his portfolio.

DIDI

I'll come with you; no one's talked to me in twenty minutes.

MADISON

You're not making an effort. You're so awesome, you've just got to show everybody. I know! Sing!

DIDI

That ain't happening.

MADISON

You're always singing in the shower. The whole dorm talks about it.

DIDI

Well that's fucking grand.

MADISON

Sing. Come on, sing. I'm not leaving until you sing. Sing, sing, sing—

DIDI

Okay, fuck.

(singing)

Poor auld Dicey Reilly she has taken to the sup!
Poor auld Dicey Reilly, she will never give it up!
She says it's nearly half past one,
Sure, I'll just pop out for another little one
for the heart of the road is Dicey Ri-iley!

(speaking to the room of partiers)

What the fuck are you all laughing at?

MADISON

See, they loved it.

DIDI

Just go get your picture taken, will you?

MADISON

Don't wait up!

DIDI

Don't hug me!

MADISON exits.

DIDI (cont)

(speaking to the room of partiers)

It's a fucking drinking song, and we're fucking drinking. You's got no fucking craic³ in your souls.

MATT enters, carrying two red plastic cups.
He speaks American Standard.

MATT

I haven't heard that since I was in Boston.

³ Pronounced like "crack."

DIDI

Then why didn't you fucking join in instead of leaving me hanging here? Your fucking ass-hole friends there put you up to talking with me?

MATT

Um. No?

DIDI

This part of your fucking initiation hazing? Talk to the fucking crazy Irish girl?

MATT

How do you know I'm a first-year?

DIDI

I served you in the fucking cafeteria and you didn't know what you was doing.

MATT

Oh! You're a townie.

DIDI

I'm on fucking work study. I'm outta here.

MATT

Wait, wait. You want something to drink?

DIDI

Did you put a rufie in it?

MATT

Uh, no.

DIDI

You gotta be careful with you frat boys. Even if you's only a pledge. Do you gotta get my number as some sort of test or something?

MATT

I just haven't heard anybody sing like that since I left Boston.

DIDI

What part a Boston are you from?

MATT

Wellesley.

DIDI

I gotta go.

MATT

But I went into the city all the time! My Mom's a shrink in Cambridge, so I'd take the red line—

DIDI

A suburb ain't livin' in Boston.

MATT

At least sit with me and finish your drink after I went all the way into the kitchen to get it.

DIDI

That an arduous journey for you?

MATT

Actually, I'm on the cross country team, so—

DIDI

Great. Even the woods won't be safe.

MATT

There isn't anything more dangerous than skunks around here. Come on. Just sit with me for a minute. There isn't anyone else from Boston—

DIDI begins to leave.

MATT (cont)

From near Boston—

DIDI stays.

MATT (cont)

—in the frat. Who else can I talk to about it?

DIDI

Tell me one thing about Southie and I'll stay.

MATT

One thing?

DIDI

One thing, that ain't from a movie. Something you could only know from going there.

MATT

Um. It's South?

DIDI gets up and shoots her drink.

DIDI

See you later. It's been grand. I gotta get up early anyways.

MATT

You having breakfast somewhere? Maybe I could meet you—

DIDI

I'm going running through the woods so I can be a librarian.

MATT

What?

DIDI

Makes just as much sense to me.

Scene 5:

DIDI enters her room as the lights come down around her. She stares at the “mirror,” speaking directly to the audience.

DIDI

I sawr a dinosoar soaring in the sky.

DIDI takes off her shoes, stands, and stares out at the audience, looking in the mirror, taking off her shirt.

DIDI

I sawr... saww a dinosoar soaring in the sky.

MADISON enters abruptly and turns on the lights. DIDI starts to put on running clothes.

MADISON

I could hear you all the way down the hall. Why are you always yelling? Oh, don't get dressed. It's nothing I haven't seen.

DIDI

I'm going for a run with the cross-country team.

MADISON

You're hella weird. Have I told you that? I'm putting my earrings under the chair here, okay? Where they'll be safe. Remind me if, uh... If I forget. Phew.

DIDI

Were you with your photo fucktard all night?

MADISON

He's so sweet. He was, like, going to shoot me wearing gossamer wings. But, just when he's got the lights set up, his girlfriend comes in—

DIDI

He's got a girlfriend?

MADISON

—and she's like, "Who's this bitch?" and I'm like, "No one calls me a bitch," and he's like, "I'm just shooting her," and she's like, "She's a fucking first year, isn't she?" and they just yelled and... I'm going back once she's gone so we can do the shoot. Do you have something to drink?

DIDI

It's seven in the morning.

MADISON

Mom and I have bloody marys on weekends if Dad's not home. Which is every weekend. Then we go shopping.

DIDI

Where do you get your clothes?

MADISON

No place that has your size.

DIDI

Abercrombie and bitch?

MADISON

Don't be so sensitive. It's just a fact.

DIDI

Where should I look?

MADISON

Didn't your mom teach you anything?

DIDI

My Ma goes grocery shopping in her dress sweats.

MADISON

Oh, God. So does mine. I'm so tired of seeing fifty year olds in Love Pink.

MADISON's phone rings.

MADISON (cont)

(into phone) Hi there. Did you get rid of— Well, when are you picking me up for the game tonight? What does she have to do with— You said you were going to teach me about hockey— Well, if you don't have to explain the rules to her, she's no fun— Are we still doing the shoot? What about the wings? Okay. I'll see you soon. (she hangs up) Fuck!

MADISON throws her expensive phone,
takes out a lipstick tube that holds cocaine,
and takes a snort.

DIDI

Not shooting your wings?

MADISON

There's some stupid hockey expo game and he's ditching me because I don't know the rules.

DIDI

The cross country team's heading out soon—

MADISON

Fine. Just leave me in my time of need.

DIDI

If I don't show up my English teacher ain't going to—

MADISON

I guess running might help you fit into some decent store's clothes.

DIDI

And hockey's too complicated for a stupid bitch like you.

MADISON

I don't see boys lining up to photograph you.

DIDI

You want to know something about hockey, tell me where to shop.

MADISON

You think you can just buy some clothes, have a little makeover montage, and—

DIDI gets up to leave.

DIDI

I'm sure his girlfriend looks better in wings than you anyways.

MADISON

Wait, wait. What do you know about hockey?

DIDI

Whatever sitting with my Dad and a case of Bud through Bruins games could teach me.

MADISON

Yeah, I think he likes the Bruins.

Where's he from?
DIDI

New York.
MADISON

What part?
DIDI

I don't know. Manhattan?
MADISON

It matters. He could like the Islanders. They's all right. He probably likes the Rangers, though. They suit him.
DIDI

Is it complicated?
MADISON

If giving me a makeover wasn't so hopeless, I guess you'd find out.
DIDI

You're not hopeless.
MADISON

So buy me something to make me look good for a professor.
DIDI

Oh, honey. You don't have to get A's that way. Have your mother call the Dean, and if she's annoying enough they'll give you an A to shut her up.
MADISON

I just want him to like me.
DIDI

Like you how?
MADISON

Not like that— I mean, I— Just to like me.
DIDI

So it's complicated.
MADISON

Why can't you just pick out some nice fucking clothes?
DIDI

MADISON

Why can't they just hit the stupid puck around?

DIDI

You're paying the shipping, too.

MADISON

You're hella cheap. I'm not overnighting it.

Scene 6:

DIDI is in the woods, out of breath. MATT enters, equally out of breath, behind her.

DIDI

Oh, good. It's the boy who knows Southie's south.

MATT

I thought that was you up ahead. Did you join cross-country to see me again?

DIDI

I'm running to be a librarian.

MATT

Right. But you remember me. I made an impression.

DIDI

A good one or a bad one, do you think?

MATT

I didn't catch your name at the party.

DIDI

I didn't catch yours either.

MATT

Matt Cohen.

DIDI

Nice to meet you, Matt.

MATT

Nice to meet you... um...

A beat. She doesn't say her name.

MATT (cont)

Right. Okay. Was this your first time running cross-country?

DIDI

Was that you I heard singing behind me?

MATT

It helps to open the lungs. If you can keep up a mantra it's aerobic not anaerobic. I thought maybe I should recite the periodic table of elements. Just to keep it in mind. They've got me on some pretty important experiments, especially for a first-year.

DIDI

You are so impressive.

MATT

Well, there aren't that many first-years whose advisors are already talking to them about Marshalls.

DIDI

What's a Marshall?

MATT

It's just one of the most prestigious fellowships there is; we're talking to a professor at Cambridge who's doing similar work with mitochondrial DNA—

DIDI

Is there something more prestigious than a Marshall?

MATT

A Rhodes maybe. That's specifically for Oxford. Only thirty-two people a year get one of those from the top universities—

DIDI

I'll talk to my advisor about picking me up one of those.

MATT

You in the sciences?

DIDI

English.

MATT

Um. You should try singing. It keeps away skunks and stuff, too.

DIDI

Does it keep away chemistry majors?

MATT

Bio, actually. Seriously, though, if we ran together we could—

DIDI

I sung at that fucking party and you didn't sing with me—

MATT

I didn't know that one.

DIDI

It's just one of the best-known drinking songs—

MATT

Hey, I hung out in Irish bars, and I never heard that one before in my—

DIDI

You're Irish, then, Mr. Cohen?

MATT

Anything you sing, I'll sing with you—

DIDI sings; MATT doesn't know the words.

DIDI

(singing) Red is the rose by yonder garden grows
And fair is the lily of the valley
Clear is the water that flows from the Boyne
But my love is fairer than any.

MATT

Where do you live?

DIDI

West Hall.

MATT

We could go running in the woods behind there sometime. Running once a week with this group isn't enough for us to get good at it.

DIDI

Should I take advice from someone who I beat my first try?

MATT

Well, someone has to come in last. You should get some better shoes, though. You'll twist your ankle running in those.

DIDI

Not as slow as I'm going.

MATT

No, seriously, those aren't safe at any speed. Check out New Balance. They've got some good stuff, and they're not made in sweatshops. Maybe I could meet you outside West on Sunday?

DIDI

I got Mass. Try Tuesday after dinner. Ask for Didi O'Connor.

Scene 7:

DIDI and MADISON in their dorm room.

DIDI

How was last night's game?

MADISON

It ended in penalty shots. It's not even a real win when that happens.

DIDI

That sounded convincing.

MADISON

And, thanks to you, I'm getting my wings tonight! So I got you these.

MADISON holds some boxes.

MADISON (cont)

I knew we'd be best friends! I need to get to the rink before puck drop. Go Raiders!

MADISON hugs DIDI, then exits. DIDI opens the boxes. They are full of clothes. She looks in the mirror, taking off her blouse and putting on the new one.

DIDI

I sawr... saw...

She takes off her jeans and puts on slacks from the box.

DIDI

A dinosoar... dino... dinosaur.

She removes her shoes and puts on pumps from the box.

DIDI

Sauring... Soar... soaring...

She puts on a blazer. American Standard:

DEIRDRE

I saw a dinosaur soaring in the sky.

Scene 8:

RICHARD, VIRGIL, and DEAN GRACE QUINCY, who speaks with a Boston Brahmin accent, are in RICHARD and VIRGIL's office. QUINCY is played by the same actor who plays MRS. O'CONNOR.

VIRGIL

Dean Quincy, when the Board elected me to Professor Emeritus status, it stated I could remain on committees as I wished.

QUINCY

But listen to reason: if we can get an anthropologist on the Fellowships Committee—

VIRGIL

I will not be resigning my seat on the Fellowships Committee—

DEIRDRE enters. She's now speaking American Standard.

DEIRDRE

I'm sorry, am I early?

RICHARD

Can you wait outside for a moment?

DEIRDRE

There aren't any chairs in the hall.

VIRGIL

Stay, my dear, stay. Didi O'Connor, this is—

DEIRDRE

Deirdre.

VIRGIL

Excuse me?

DEIRDRE

Deirdre O'Connor.

VIRGIL

Well. This is Dean Quincy, chair of the Fellowships Committee, which I will not be quitting.

QUINCY

Charmed. Do I detect a bit of Boston?

DEIRDRE

A bit.

QUINCY

I was at Harvard with President Hutchinson before she came here. How she persuaded me to move to this wilderness, I'll never understand.

VIRGIL

I'm glad this is settled then.

QUINCY

This is far from settled. Hutchinson wants some jewel in her crown during her first five years to show off to the trustees, and Mr. LeBlanc is the best bet we have for a Rhodes, which—

DEIRDRE

A Rhodes Scholarship?

QUINCY

He's a first-year and has already visited the Amazon three times during high school. He is in the process of setting up an NGO to monitor the effects of the oil industry on natives—

DEIRDRE

You mean South American citizens?

QUINCY

Yes, of course—

RICHARD

Please, Miss O'Connor.

DEIRDRE

I'm just saying "natives" isn't the proper—

QUINCY

Of course it wasn't, a bit of backwards short hand from me, but the point, Virgil, is that if an anthropologist replaces you on the committee we could assist LeBlanc *now* so that during his senior year—

VIRGIL

You may be a Dean, but you have no right to strong-arm an Emeritus Professor out of a post I've held for over twenty years. I do have seniority on the Committee.

QUINCY

But Mr. LeBlanc needs the support of an anthropology professor—

VIRGIL

And another student may need my support.

QUINCY

We'll keep discussing this.

VIRGIL

Alas.

QUINCY exits.

DEIRDRE

I have an idea for a Rhodes—

RICHARD

Have you done something different with your hair?

VIRGIL

It's her clothes. Fetching, isn't she?

RICHARD

She... well... is certainly dressed up for a paper review.

DEIRDRE

I, um... Okay. I thought I could write my final paper about *Portrait of an Artist* and how Joyce's literature contributed to Irish nationalism, how he forged a whole native voice from the smithy of his soul, and maybe that would be a good Rhodes—

RICHARD

A librarian doesn't need a Rhodes Scholarship.

DEIRDRE

But if you let me write on Joyce, I think I could really find my voice in the work—

RICHARD

The course is British literature, Miss O'Connor. Not Irish.

DEIRDRE

I'd be more committed to Joyce as a topic, and a scholarship at Oxford would be just the place to study him— How can I get to Europe unless it's on a fellowship?

VIRGIL

There are plenty of study abroad programs—

DEIRDRE

I can't afford them.

RICHARD

Your final paper will be on Conrad.

VIRGIL

He's no more British than Joyce.

DEIRDRE

I don't want to rewrite that paper every week.

RICHARD

Conrad was a British citizen, and if you want to pass my class, you will continue our work on—

DEIRDRE

But I don't care about Conrad—

RICHARD

Then you must learn to. As far as this latest draft goes, your written language is much improved. And, I must say, so is your spoken English. I've made comments throughout, but I want to concentrate on your conclusion as it encapsulates a problem highlighted by your newfound writing abilities. Miss O'Connor, you don't know how to read.

DEIRDRE

Maybe I just don't read an apologist for imperialism the same as a Brit.

VIRGIL

Don't take his tone at face value, dear, this is the most fun I've ever seen him have.

RICHARD

Listen: (reading) "Irregardless of Conrad's supposed sympathy for the Africans, by covering for Kurtz when speaking to his fiancée at the end of the novella, he ultimately hides imperialism's sins." How is Conrad buying indulgence for imperialism's sins, Miss O'Connor?

DEIRDRE

You don't think Conrad's racist, calling them—?

RICHARD

First, Conrad has created a narrator, Marlowe, who is telling the story. You can't assume Marlowe's views are Conrad's. More importantly, tell me how it ends.

DEIRDRE

Marlowe get his choice of nightmares. He goes back to Europe and lies to Kurtz's fiancée, tells her that Kurtz died with her name on his lips.

RICHARD

Ah. So Marlowe lies to Kurtz's fiancée?

DEIRDRE

Kurtz's last words are, "The horror, the horror." Nothing about his fiancée.

RICHARD

And your piercing description tells me you've given this a great deal of thought.

DEIRDRE

Conrad was a racist, you just can't accept your own racism—

VIRGIL

Now, Didi—

DEIRDRE

Deirdre.

VIRGIL

As much fun as you two are having, you can't insult a—

RICHARD

Conrad, like me, is a racist, a supporter of imperialism, and all the rest, no doubt?

DEIRDRE

He doesn't even think Africans are human.

RICHARD

Doesn't he?

DEIRDRE

He compares them to animals through the whole book.

RICHARD

Achebe would agree with you, no doubt. But would Said? And where was Conrad born?

DEIRDRE

Conrad's a British imperialist—

RICHARD

You must begin to read outside the text. I'll e-mail you some criticism to read over the next month that you must incorporate into your paper by finals week—

DEIRDRE

But I want to write about Joyce—

RICHARD

Out of the question. We'll continue to meet weekly to examine your rewrites. And one more thing, Miss O'Connor: "irregardless" is not a word. All it does is show your socioeconomic deficiencies. "Regardless" is the word for which you're searching. You must use your background, not let it use you.

DEIRDRE

So let me use it to get a Rhodes and study Joyce over there. Everybody loves a rags to riches

story, and I could get anywhere in Europe from the U.K.! I've met some of the first-years they're prepping for this kind of shit, and they don't have anything I don't have. I can show them that it doesn't matter where I come from—

RICHARD

How many NGO's have you started in the Amazon?

VIRGIL

On the other hand, there's always something attractive to fellowship committees about an underdog—

DEIRDRE

I already got into this school against all odds, didn't I? I'm the ultimate ugly ducking, but I got a swan in me, and I—

RICHARD

You are best suited to return as a librarian to help your fellow unfortunate—

VIRGIL

But if one of your students was even nominated for something so prestigious, a tenure line might finally come knocking.

RICHARD

There is, alas, nothing remarkable about Miss O'Connor. If she were Jewish and found something admirable in fascism, perhaps we'd have something to work with, but as it is—

VIRGIL

You don't mean that—

RICHARD

Nearly every academic text begins, "Most people think x, but actually y." If I were you, I'd forget about the Rhodes and worry about your financial aid that is apparently hanging by a thread.

DEIRDRE

Am I going to pass your class?

RICHARD

We'll see what paper you present after Thanksgiving during finals.

VIRGIL

Oh, he doesn't have you in here every week because you're not going to pass.

RICHARD

Our weekly meetings are making up for her lack of preparation in—

VIRGIL

He just can't go a week without seeing you.

Scene 9:
DEIRDRE walks to a table. She spreads a white tablecloth over it and sits, waiting.
MATT enters, carrying a bookbag.

MATT

Wow, you look great, Didi.

DEIRDRE

Deirdre.

MATT

Right. Sorry. So does the cafeteria. They're really busting it out for Family Weekend. Did you put out all the centerpieces?

DEIRDRE

I got here at 6am to make sure it got done right.

MATT

Where are your parents?

DEIRDRE

They couldn't come.

MATT

But I thought—

DEIRDRE

It's parents weekend at UMass, too, so the garage needs to be open twenty-four hours. Pa could work a double if he stayed. Time and a half. He can't pass up work like that, not just to visit me.

MATT

Oh. Well. My parents will be excited to meet you. You can come out to dinner with us tomorrow night, be a part of our Family Weekend—

DEIRDRE

I can't, it's Sunday.

MATT

Can't you miss Mass this one time, Didi?

DEIRDRE

Deirdre.

MATT

Right. Deirdre. Sorry, I'm still getting used to it.

DEIRDRE

Why can't we go out tonight?

MATT

They want to rest tonight; it's a long drive. It's just one Mass.

DEIRDRE

It's not my fault they only have one Catholic Mass ghettoized at 7pm—

MATT

Ghettoized?

DEIRDRE

You know what I mean.

MATT

Well, we can figure it out tomorrow... Maybe get brunch or something... In the meantime... Deirdre, I know nothing lights up a girl's eyes like that little blue box, but—

DEIRDRE

What little blue box?

MATT

That little turquoise box? Usually has diamonds in it? Really?

DEIRDRE

I have no idea what you're talking about.

MATT

Okay. When I drive you home for break, we'll stop in New York and I'll show you— Well, you'll love it. Anyway, Deirdre, I know nothing lights up—

DEIRDRE

You've got a little speech planned, don't you?

MATT

Fuck it. Here.

MATT reaches into his bag and gives DEIRDRE a box. It holds running shoes.

DEIRDRE

New Balance.

MATT

So your feet won't get messed up.

DEIRDRE

I don't know what to say— Matt. The receipt's in here.

MATT

Yeah, I didn't know what size you were, and Mom said I had to guess small to not insult you, so the receipt's there in case you need to exchange—

DEIRDRE

They're \$150.

MATT

Yeah, sorry—

DEIRDRE

Why are you—

MATT

I couldn't get you the top of the line. Dad's consulting hasn't done so good this year; I can't even go to Aspen with the Phi Delt guys over Winter Break. But most of Mom's patients are Harvard professors and they never stop being crazy, so—

DEIRDRE

The shoes are perfect.

MATT

No, the best ones have this cool new sole—

DEIRDRE kisses MATT

MATT (cont)

What would have happened if I got you the top of the line?

Scene 10:

DIDI is in the car with her parents. MR. O'CONNOR is driving.

MR. O'CONNOR

(to another driver) Speed limit's fifty-five here, ya fucking moron!

MRS. O'CONNOR

There's the exit.

MR. O'CONNOR

I see it, I see it. Fuckin' interstates. Why do we gotta drive you five hours back to school after Thanksgiving just to pick you up a week later?

DEIRDRE

It's finals week; I don't know why they schedule it that way.

MR. O'CONNOR

Do we really gotta meet your fucking professor?

DEIRDRE

I think it will help me pass the class.

MRS. O'CONNOR

How's that?

DEIRDRE

He wants me to go back home and replace Mrs. Brock when I'm done, so meeting you two—

MR. O'CONNOR

We gotta be the dog and pony show from Southie?

MRS. O'CONNOR

It'll be nice to have you home for all of Christmas break—

DEIRDRE

Well, Matt invited me to spend some of it with his family in Wellesley—

MR. O'CONNOR

You ain't stayin' the night with your fucking boyfriend— Hey, bimbo! I got my blinker on here! Get the fuck out of my way!

MRS. O'CONNOR

I don't think he sawr you.

MR. O'CONNOR flips off the other driver.

MR. O'CONNOR

The bastard sawr that, didn't he?

MRS. O'CONNOR

Why don't we have Matt over to Sunday dinner when Pegs and Molly are there?

MR. O'CONNOR

Don't forget Useless. He won't pass up a free meal.

DEIRDRE

It's hard for Matt to get down into the city.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Can't he just take the T?

DEIRDRE

I don't know, Ma.

MRS. O'CONNOR

I take the T up to Wellesley to clean Mrs. Abelson's house all the time—

DIDI

I guess he don't—

MRS. O'CONNOR

If he's too stuck up to visit us, you two ain't gonna last long.

DIDI

Anyways, I think Sundays is when Mrs. Brock wants me working.

MRS. O'CONNOR

You can't miss Sunday dinners, and what about Church?

DIDI

I'll go to the early Mass, don't worry.

MR. O'CONNOR

She's gotta get money for next semester somehow— Get off your phone and drive you fucking bastard!

MRS. O'CONNOR

You didn't go through all your savings, did you?

DEIRDRE

No, but—

MR. O'CONNOR

You wanna play fucky fuck with me!

MRS. O'CONNOR

Maybe Santa will bring you a couple hundred dollars—

MR. O'CONNOR

Santa's broke.

DIDI

It's alright, Ma, I can work at the library—

MRS. O'CONNOR

If you didn't need such ridiculous clothes—

DEIRDRE

My old clothes aren't fitting now that I'm running—

MR. O'CONNOR

Well, you ain't got the fashion sense of Pegs, that's for sure—

DIDI

Maybe Pegs woulda finished high school if she didn't dress like a whore—

MRS. O'CONNOR

I'm sorry you's jealous that your sister's prettier than you's, but that's just the way it is.

MR. O'CONNOR

I never understood how you got so fat on your ma's shitty cooking.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Great. You missed the exit.

MR. O'CONNOR

I didn't miss no exit.

MRS. O'CONNOR

They said take route 12B.

MR. O'CONNOR

And there's route 12.

MRS. O'CONNOR

It's not the same thing.

MR. O'CONNOR

How's route 12 not the same thing?

MRS. O'CONNOR

It's supposed to be 12B! Look, they say—

MR. O'CONNOR

I'm driving, I can't look—

MRS. O'CONNOR

You need to turn around! Turn around!

Scene 11:
DEIRDRE, MR. and MRS. O'CONNOR,
and VIRGIL enter and find RICHARD
sitting at a table.

VIRGIL

I told you we'd find him here. It's his favorite coffee shop on campus.

RICHARD

It's the only coffee shop on campus.

VIRGIL

You must have forgotten about our appointment to meet—

RICHARD

Must I honor this bizarre American custom of meeting students' parents at university?

MRS. O'CONNOR

It's so nice to meet you, I'm Didi's mother—

DEIRDRE

Deirdre.

MR. O'CONNOR

What's wrong with "Didi"?

DEIRDRE

What's wrong with Deirdre? It was your Dad's favorite story.

RICHARD

I thought the point of university was to escape parents. It certainly was for me.

VIRGIL

Shall we sit?

MR. O'CONNOR

Is Didi talking with this fake fucking accent your idea?

MRS. O'CONNOR

Will your wives be joining us for dinner?

RICHARD

Dinner?

VIRGIL

We're not married.

MR. O'CONNOR

Didi, how's some fucking light in the loafers professor gonna teach you how to work like a real man?

RICHARD

My Oxford's seem fairly heavy.

VIRGIL

Though my loafers do appear a little light.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Well, is either of you bringing a, um, special someone to dinner with us?

VIRGIL

My partner recently passed away.

RICHARD

And I'm afraid the dating pool is a bit shallow in our collegiate wasteland.

VIRGIL

He gets bored so quickly with anyone who can't engage in verbal jousting. Words are his foreplay, so—

RICHARD

Virgil, please.

MR. O'CONNOR

You gotta get a wife to make you tea, Doc. Tea tastes better when it's made by someone else. It's a proven fact.

RICHARD

I'm perfectly capable of making my own tea.

MRS. O'CONNOR

But neither of you got no one waiting at home for you nights?

VIRGIL

Academia's a sort of family, Mrs. O'Connor.

RICHARD

Sometimes I care for Virgil's cat.

VIRGIL

His name is Maplethorpe. A maine coon. Breathtakingly large.

RICHARD

Must you?

MR. O'CONNOR

Didi says you went to Oxford. Now, that's a pretty good school, ain't it?

RICHARD

Well, since a PhD at Oxford doesn't include course work, it's actually hard to translate into the American system—

MR. O'CONNOR

So where's it rank?

RICHARD

That's what I'm trying to explain. While it is a premiere institution in the U.K., its rank here—

MR. O'CONNOR

Don't it got a number, in those magazines?

RICHARD

I suppose it must, but I'm afraid I don't know it.

MRS. O'CONNOR

How'd you pick it?

RICHARD

If Oxford offered your daughter a fellowship, would you check its ranking in a magazine?

MR. O'CONNOR

You got a scholarship?

VIRGIL

Oh, you must. One should never pay for a graduate education.

DEIRDRE

Just like I got the scholarship here.

RICHARD

With luck, though, Miss O'Connor will be attending a good library science program after she graduates, and since those are trade schools she will likely pay.

MRS. O'CONNOR

What do you mean it's a trade school?

RICHARD

Library science is a trade, like being a machinist or—

VIRGIL

What Richard means is that masters degrees which expect a certain return on the student's investment often have tuition, but if one is doing a purely academic degree—

MR. O'CONNOR

You two got these pure degrees? And didn't pay nothin' to get 'em? Well let me ask you this, then. Whattya make here?

RICHARD

Excuse me?

DEIRDRE

He makes students with intellectual ambition.

MR. O'CONNOR

If he's your mentor, then he must make a pretty penny—

VIRGIL

A life in academia is an extremely rewarding—

MRS. O'CONNOR

So you's all don't make that much?

DIDI

He's a doctor, Ma, a professor, of course he makes plenty. Why do you need to—

MR. O'CONNOR

You's the one that set up this little tête-à-tête, I'm just showing interest, or should we talk about what kinda verbal foreplay would keep him from getting bored—

VIRGIL

Of course by “verbal foreplay” I mean a lively intellectual exchange between—

RICHARD

I make 36,000 a year.

MR. O'CONNOR

That's less than Pegs.

RICHARD

What's a Pegs?

DEIRDRE

My sister. She's a secretary at UMass.

RICHARD

Ah, yes, well, the administration does see the lion's share of salary these days—

MR. O'CONNOR

So my daughter that dropped outta high school makes more than you?

RICHARD

Well, perhaps Miss O'Connor should just apprentice with her sister—

VIRGIL

The pay scale goes up as you—

MRS. O'CONNOR

But you must get good benefits?

RICHARD

I use the same health center as Miss O'Connor here.

DIDI

You do?

RICHARD

Were I to get seriously ill, I would ask Virgil to drive me to Syracuse and pay out of pocket.

MR. O'CONNOR

Do they not give Brits driver's licenses?

RICHARD

I can't afford a car.

MR. O'CONNOR

I ain't no Oxford doctor, but at least I got a car. Paid off in full.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Well, professors don't work very hard. You only teach a few hours a week, get summers off, whole years of sabbaticals.

RICHARD

It is truly an easy life.

DIDI

Ma, you don't see everything he's doing for me.

VIRGIL

It's hard to see from outside, Mrs. O'Connor, but teaching is only about 40% of what we do—

MR. O'CONNOR

Then what are we paying you for?

DIDI

The fuckin' school's paying me to be here, not you's guys.

MR. O'CONNOR

I'm payin' for your education.

DIDI

How?

MR. O'CONNOR

I gave you \$3,000!

DIDI

That don't even cover room and board! I can't buy my fucking books!

RICHARD

Is that why you never have the books? Your parents won't even—

MR. O'CONNOR

I'm giving her plenty!

DIDI

This fucking outfit cost three-hundred!

RICHARD

I have desk copies of all the required reading, I'll give you—

MR. O'CONNOR

What the hell do you need a suit to go to class for?

RICHARD

Dress and composure will be part of how she's measured here, Mr. O'Connor, especially if she wants to go on to graduate work, whether in library sciences or a more purely academic path—

MR. O'CONNOR

So she can make 36k a year?

RICHARD

Paths exist beyond mine; perhaps her abilities will land more than an adjunct position.

VIRGIL

Richard is always at a disadvantage. Perfectly brilliant intellect, but no ability for small talk.

MRS. O'CONNOR

You're going to give my daughter something you can't get?

DIDI

It's how I can use the gifts God gave me, Ma, and I gotta have a few outfits for here.

MR. O'CONNOR

You must have your head up your ass to think talking like this fucking Brit is going to help you when he can't even—

VIRGIL

Many students here choose to neutralize their regional—

RICHARD

Now I see where you get it, Miss O'Connor. "Irregardless" of any Brit's supposed sympathy for the Irish, he ultimately hides imperialism's sins, yes?

MR. O'CONNOR

You just explain to me what Didi's doing here if she ends up making less than her sister—

DIDI

I don't want to answer phones for—

MR. O'CONNOR

It's good enough to put a roof over your niece's—

DIDI

It ain't about being good enough. I ain't never had no one to talk to like this. They's showing me a whole conversation I didn't even know existed, that goes back hundreds of years—

MR. O'CONNOR

You want some fucking clothes, I'll buy you some clothes. Your sister's got nicer clothes than what you're wearing.

RICHARD

If money is your scoreboard, Mr. O'Connor, take your daughter home, and perhaps consider a nursing school. It's far easier than being a librarian and a much better return on your investment. Happy Christmas, Miss O'Connor. No need to rewrite your paper after all. We need not meet during finals week. Your A is secure.

RICHARD exits.

DEIRDRE

Professor Cosgrave, wait, please—

VIRGIL

Excuse me. He's not always like this— Well, yes, he is, but he means well. It was a pleasure meeting you. Don't worry, Deirdre.

VIRGIL exits to the office.

DIDI

Nice work, Dad.

MR. O'CONNOR

He said you got an A; what you worried for?

DIDI

Every minute of every day is part of the game here. Even what happened just now. I gotta go, just wait here, I'll be right—

MRS. O'CONNOR

Didi, wait. What's this conversation you want to be part of?

DIDI

It's like I'm finding a voice I never knew I had; Professor Cosgrave's work is showing me parts of myself that—

MRS. O'CONNOR

He showing you “verbal jousting”?

DIDI

It ain't like that.

MR. O'CONNOR

That mental midget ain't got nothin' to teach you about work.

DIDI

I can be someone other people read, that other people quote. I got it in me, but I gotta learn their language.

MRS. O'CONNOR

We's all speaking English, ain't we?

DIDI

If I wanna be a light of the world, Ma, I gotta get to that city on top of the hill. Ain't that what all God's gifts are about? I gotta get them to look up to me.

Scene 12:

VIRGIL and RICHARD are in their office.

VIRGIL

Excuse me, but what the fuck was that?

RICHARD

Fucking animals.

VIRGIL

Animals? They're your students' parents. They deserve your respect.

RICHARD

For what? For conceiving her on some filthy mattress? Some stained, sagging—

VIRGIL

They're her family.

RICHARD

(RICHARD's accent slips a bit) Some family don't deserfe respect.

DEIRDRE knocks on the door.

RICHARD (cont)

Enter.

DEIRDRE opens the door, steps inside.

VIRGIL

Before you two have it out, listen to the advice of an old man. We're all of us at least half in love with dusty tomes whose pages are cut maybe once or twice. To find someone who'll share that love is too rare to pass up just because of society's strictures.

RICHARD

Please leave, Virgil.

VIRGIL exits, closing the door.

RICHARD (cont)

Door open, please.

VIRGIL

Jesus, Richard, don't you want this to be private—?

RICHARD

Door open, please.

VIRGIL exits, leaving the door open.

DEIRDRE

Why did you do this to me?

RICHARD

Teach you? Prepare you? Enlighten—

DIDI

I try to show you what I'm up against and you just scurry back to this vault, but out there? That's what I gotta live with. That's what I'm going home to.

RICHARD

I don't allow anyone to speak to me like that anymore—

DEIRDRE

But you leave the door open a crack just to make sure we can't ever have a real conversation.

RICHARD

That is the legal reality of the times Miss O'—

DEIRDRE

Call me Deirdre. They won't. You made me change it. Let me hear you say it. Just once.

RICHARD

Miss O'C—

DEIRDRE

You can't even say it? (silence) Why did you put me up to this? Was it just to laugh at me? To make jokes with Virgil and Dean Quincy when I came through that door saying I could be a Rhodes Scholar. All you think I can be is a plumber for books, a fucking trade school?

RICHARD

Your parents are waiting, no doubt.

DEIRDRE

Waiting to tell me the hundred ways I'm betraying the neighborhood by being here, by even wanting to be here. And that's what they're going to be screaming about at Sunday dinner for the rest of my life.

RICHARD

So send them back where they belong, prepare for your finals, and imagine opening the door to your room at Oxford.

DEIRDRE

When will I have a room at Oxford?

RICHARD

I thought you wanted a Rhodes Scholarship? We have three years to prepare, Miss O'Connor. But Rhodes Scholars don't go back to Southie and become librarians. They become president of the United States; they write for the *New York Times*; they win the Nobel Prize. Is that what you want?

DIDI

(holding out her hand) It's how we get the ivory, ain't it Kurtz, me boy?

They shake hands.

Blackout

Act II

Scene 1:
DEIRDRE and RICHARD sit at a table,
with teacups and a teapot.

DEIRDRE

It's my eighteenth draft and classes start tomorrow. I should get some sleep before—

RICHARD

It could be your one-hundredth draft: if it fails to get you to Quincy's cocktail party interview, it's a waste of our last three year's work. You must hit upon the most compelling thousand words ever uttered by a woman of twenty.

DEIRDRE

Twenty-one. As of August thirteenth.

RICHARD

Well, as there's no triskaidekaphobia at this school, we'll hope the university's thirteen founders with their thirteen prayers bring you luck your senior year. So tell me your argument.

DEIRDRE

You have it in front of you.

RICHARD

I have an incoherent mess in front of me. Make it cohere. Or do you enjoy bringing drunken faculty their overcooked roasts too much too give up your job waitressing at the Inn?

DEIRDRE

Well, it's about how literature shapes how people interact with the world.

RICHARD

And how does that relate to you wanting to work on Conrad at Oxford?

DEIRDRE

It's all on the paper in front of you—

RICHARD

And, bang. No Rhodes for you. You must be able to express it verbally. My dear Miss O'Connor, do you realize everything we've done for the past three years must form a narrative which convinces people to give you the most coveted fellowship in the U.S.? Quincy's candidate, Mr. LeBlanc, has started an NGO in the Amazon, while you—

DEIRDRE

I started a cross-country running program for disadvantaged youths in the area; Matt even got New Balance to donate shoes—

RICHARD

And where's that on the page? All I see is a throw-away line about community service. Mr.

LeBlanc's father gave him the start-up capital for his Amazon NGO, and you did this on your own—

DEIRDRE

Matt helped—

RICHARD

And LeBlanc has never won a fellowship before whereas you've received a merit scholarship every year you've been at University, right up to your senior year. Where's that?

DEIRDRE

I only get a thousand words to say—

RICHARD

So put it all in, then trim it back.

DEIRDRE

But it's due next Monday.

RICHARD

Which is why we must get at least a serviceable draft done tonight. I am sorry you had to miss Mass, but you simply must have a decent draft before classes start. More tea? Oh, it's empty.

DEIRDRE

Want to switch to Jameson?

RICHARD

I'm not quite ready to be sacked for drinking with a student.

DEIRDRE

I'll make another pot, then.

RICHARD

No, we should finish this up before it gets too late. Though I must ask: is singing part of your secret brewing process?

DEIRDRE

You heard that?

RICHARD

From the porch. Gaelic caterwauling isn't particularly subtle.

DEIRDRE

You Brits are so repressed.

RICHARD

(Singing) And it's no, nay, never,

DEIRDRE and RICHARD clap in time.

DEIRDRE and RICHARD

(singing) No nay never no more!
Will I play the wild rover
No never no more!

DEIRDRE

They teach you Irish drinking songs at Oxford?

RICHARD

Get the Rhodes and go find out for yourself. No more singing; pretend I haven't read this and convince me you deserve the Rhodes more than LeBlanc.

DEIRDRE

You'd expect an Irish girl from South Boston whose Dad lionizes Bobby Sands to reject Joseph Conrad outright as a British imperialist—but what about Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski whose parents were killed by Russian imperialists? How should I relate to him?

RICHARD

Rhetorical questions are poor form.

DEIRDRE

When I learned that this supposed icon of British Imperialism was actually Polish and a victim of Russian Imperialism, I rethought everything I knew about empire. To the end of his life, Conrad spoke English with such a heavy Polish accent that he was difficult to understand, and contemporaneous Britons likened him to “a Polish Jew,” “an Oriental,” “a semi-Mongolian,” and “a monkey.” This knowledge completely shifted how I viewed descriptions of Africans in *Heart of Darkness*. Putting Conrad in context taught me a way of reading based on conversation rather than dogma.

RICHARD

What about community service?

DEIRDRE

I, uh, continue this type of dialogue in my service to the community by tutoring English at Stockbridge Valley High School—not just helping them with *what* they read, but, more importantly, *how* they read.

RICHARD

And your cross-country program?

DEIRDRE

Um, I'm trying to enlarge the worlds of disadvantaged youths by pointing out the nature all around them; I'm trying to get them to “read” the physical world differently.

RICHARD

In the same way you're trying to get them to read texts differently. Yes. So why isn't that in this application?

DEIRDRE

You think it'll be convincing enough to outmatch an NGO in the Amazon?

RICHARD

It's the best I've heard you express your ideas thus far. That's all I can say.

KELLI enters dressed in a waitress uniform, played by the same actor as MADISON. She speaks with a working-class Buffalo accent.

KELLI

You ain't in bed yet—? Oh. Professor Cosgrave.

RICHARD

Doctor McLean.

DEIRDRE

You two know each other?

KELLI

He started my senior year. He wouldn't supervise my honor's thesis.

DEIRDRE

You never mentioned that.

KELLI

I didn't know he'd be in my house. How do you like our little Shanty?

RICHARD

I, um—

DEIRDRE

She waitresses at the Inn with me.

RICHARD

Yes, I've seen her there, of course.

KELLI

Great use of my PhD, ain't it?

RICHARD

I believe you were warned against going to a program for which you were required to pay—

KELLI

You warned me all right. The entire English faculty thought I should go get my PhD, but you warned me I wasn't good enough to—

RICHARD

I warned you about the economics of graduate school, not about your ability to—

DEIRDRE

What are you doing home?

KELLI

It's 2am. Father Shiner asked after you, said you missed mass.

DEIRDRE

So did you.

KELLI

I was working.

DEIRDRE

So was I.

RICHARD

I should be going. Miss O'Connor, I'll expect that new draft in the morning.

KELLI

It is morning.

RICHARD

Quite right. I'm off then.

KELLI

Don't go on my account.

RICHARD

Nice to see you.

RICHARD exits.

KELLI

So that's how you get your A's.

DIDI

He just comes over sometimes to help with—

KELLI

This ain't the first time?

DEIRDRE

It's the first time he's stayed this late, but—

KELLI

And always when I'm working?

DEIRDRE

Not intentionally.

KELLI

Does Matt know?

DEIRDRE

Matt's not getting back into town until tomorrow.

KELLI

What do you see in a pretentious prick like Cosgrave?

DEIRDRE

There's something about his voice.

KELLI

You're suckered by that fucking accent?

DEIRDRE

Not how he speaks: his voice. It's solid. You could build with it.

KELLI

Well, I ain't telling Matt about any of this because I think you two make a cute couple. But if you want to keep your boyfriend, I'd stick to meeting your professors in their offices.

Scene 2:

DEIRDRE and MATT sit together in the Shanty.

DEIRDRE

What a week. I thought senior year was supposed to be easy and we could cut class and—

MATT

If we didn't have these fellowship applications, and grad school applications, and—

DEIRDRE

I love the smell of the Shanty in the morning.

MATT

It would smell even better with coffee.

DEIRDRE
So go make it, wifey.

MATT
I thought you ran out?

DEIRDRE
I got some on the way home from the Inn last night.

MATT
What's open after your shift?

DEIRDRE
Nothing but the Wal-Mart.

MATT
Did someone give you a ride out there?

DEIRDRE
Nope.

MATT
So you stole it from the Inn?

DEIRDRE
I liberated it. Come on, fuck, if the fucking faculty actually tipped me, I could afford some coffee.

MATT
But restaurant owners have a really thin margin—

DEIRDRE
Just go make the coffee, huh?

MATT goes offstage.

MATT (from off)
(singing) Hydrogen, helium, lithium—

DEIRDRE (cont)
(to MATT) Is Kelli up yet?

MATT (from off)
Haven't seen her.

DEIRDRE
Went on another bender, maybe.

MATT enters carrying coffee beans.

MATT

This isn't fair trade.

DEIRDRE

Well, stealers can't be choosers.

MATT

Look, do you want me to just buy you some—

DEIRDRE

I don't want any of your—

MATT

Because stealing's bad enough, but then it's this crap that—

DEIRDRE

I'm sorry it's not up to your Wellesley standards—

MATT

This isn't about—

DEIRDRE

Your Ma made it perfectly clear that putting milk in my Earl Grey was some fucking capital crime—

MATT

This is about not taking advantage of third world—

DEIRDRE

(imitating Matt's mom) "You drink Earl Grey clear, dear. The citrus curdles the milk."

MATT

If it's not fair trade you're just paying some middle-man—

DIDI

And what the fuck's clear? (imitating Matt's mom) "We drink tea clear, dear, coffee black, and liquor neat." (South Boston accent) Well, ain't that fuckin' charmin'?

MATT

This is not about my mother.

DEIRDRE

(back to American standard) Of course. We can't say anything about the great and powerful Dr. Cohen—

MATT

This is about what your money is contributing to—

DEIRDRE

I stole it!

MATT

And that's better?

KELLI enters in street clothes carrying a paper bag.

KELLI

The sweet sound of the Shanty! Our Irish lass and Jewish scholar at it again.

DEIRDRE

He might be sleeping in his room at Phi Delt tonight if he keeps this up.

KELLI

Promises, promises.

MATT

Just because I think responsible purchases are—

DEIRDRE

You think we can afford fair trade where I'm from?

MATT

How would I know? You won't let me visit.

DEIRDRE

It's hard to get to.

MATT

I could just take the T down from Wellesley to—

DIDI

It ain't that simple.

MATT

Sure it is, I do it all the—

KELLI

Enough! I bear gifts.

KELLI takes three forties out of the bag.

KELLI (cont)

A present for your successful first week of classes.

MATT

A little early for that, don't you think?

KELLI

It's 2pm.

DEIRDRE

That late?

KELLI

You got somewhere to be?

DEIRDRE

Matt was just about to make coffee.

KELLI

You two just got up, didn't you?

MATT

No.

KELLI

Yes you did. Do you not have morning classes? No Friday classes at all?

MATT

I've got lab at five.

DEIRDRE

I have to work on my Rhodes application.

KELLI

They should hire me in admissions; I'd tell all the prospies what makes life here so great.

MATT

I'm sure you could get an administrative position, if not here, somewhere. Then you wouldn't have to be a waitress—

KELLI

Shut your cake hole.

MATT

I'm serious, you don't have live here and get treated like the help at The Inn—

KELLI

'Cause administrative jobs are just growing on trees—

MATT

You don't know, you're not even looking—

KELLI

I like it here.

MATT

Failure to launch.

KELLI

I launched.

MATT

SUNY Buffalo doesn't count—you've never traveled, never seen anything, never even been out of the country—

KELLI

Let me just call up my accountant and see if I can afford Rio this year—

DEIRDRE

She can't go anywhere while she's in the lead.

MATT

Oh, god, your stupid game.

KELLI

Professor Johnson pinched my ass last night, so that puts me six ahead of you.

DEIRDRE

I give you my solemn oath I will be sexually harassed as much as you.

KELLI

You're dreaming.

MATT

It's really offensive, you know? As a feminist, I can't in good conscience just sit here while—

KELLI

Once my Shanty roommate goes off to England, I'm sure to win.

DEIRDRE

No need to worry about me going anywhere's, but Matt's getting that Marshall with his mitochondrial shindigs—

MATT

I'll get the Marshall; you'll get the Rhodes, and we'll be just a quick little bus ride apart.

DEIRDRE

Cosgrave won't even let me turn in my application, yet.

KELLI

What draft are you on now?

MATT

My mother couldn't understand why you wouldn't even visit Boston over the summer; you could have worked on the application with me—

DEIRDRE

You think the rent on our lovely Shanty pays itself? Anyways, the application isn't due until Monday—

KELLI

You're seeing Cosgrave over the weekend?

DIDI

I gotta.

KELLI

In his office?

DEIRDRE

At the coffee shop.

MATT

Cosgrave's being ridiculous, it's already amazing, way better than my—

DEIRDRE

Unfortunately, our dear Dean Quincy adores LeBlanc's NGO, doesn't quite see the utility of reading, so it's got to be more than amazing, it's got to be—

KELLI

Well, you two are smarter than anyone I've known at that university, so I'm sure you'll both—

MATT

Even if we don't, Quincy will write Deirdre an awesome letter for Harvard's PhD program, and my advisor went to MIT, so at least we've got good backups—

DEIRDRE

I don't know if it will be that easy.

KELLI

You can always fail to launch with me. Extended adolescence ain't so bad.

MATT

Well, I'm not accepting the Marshall unless you get the Rhodes. Not if we can both be in PhD programs in Boston.

DEIRDRE

Really?

KELLI

Kinda makes some of your late nights over the summer seem pretty stupid, don't it?

DEIRDRE

Me, too.

MATT

You what?

DEIRDRE

I won't take the Rhodes unless you get the Marshall. What's wrong with Harvard, right? It's fancy as hell.

MATT

No, you have to take the Rhodes if you get it; coming from where you did it would be—

DEIRDRE

How's it different from you getting the Marshall?

MATT

I can do my work anywhere there's a lab. A Rhodes for a humanities major opens up whole worlds in a way that nothing else—

KELLI

An English PhD don't guarantee you a job, that's for sure.

DEIRDRE

We should drag the couch out onto the porch and get to work on that beer.

KELLI

We need a porch couch.

DEIRDRE

Indeed.

MATT

You two are so weird.

Scene 3:

DEIRDRE enters RICHARD's office. She leaves the door slightly open, of course.

RICHARD

Shorts and trainers; the very picture of Irish gentility.

DEIRDRE

I'm sure Kitty O'Shea was as fond of athletics as Cecil Rhodes was.

RICHARD

And both so very fond of Parnell. While you were out running through the woods, embodying that curious Amazon ideal that Cecil Rhodes requires for what is essentially an academic scholarship, I looked over the first chapter of your senior thesis. Your orthography is a crime against humanity.

DEIRDRE

You're as bad as James Joyce mocking his wife's spelling.

RICHARD

You're not my wife.

DIDI

And you ain't no Joycean exile from Ireland.

RICHARD

You still wear your cross while jogging?

DEIRDRE

Perhaps this should be my interview outfit?

RICHARD

Cart before the horse, Miss O'Connor, I'm afraid.

DEIRDRE

What's wrong?

RICHARD

I had a conversation with Quincy.

DEIRDRE

And?

RICHARD

LeBlanc is the Rhodes candidate advancing to the cocktail party interview.

DEIRDRE

But I thought you said my application was ready—

RICHARD

Fellowships are a crapshoot, Miss O'Connor; now we'll have to concentrate on PhD programs.

Quincy was sufficiently impressed to write a letter for you, and given her Harvard connections, there's a good chance that—

DEIRDRE

So I gotta go back to Boston. Just like you always wanted. Didi Dedalus flew too close to the sun.

RICHARD

Joyce may have forged a national voice in the smithy of his soul, but he could never go home again. You should feel lucky returning to—

DIDI

You're perfectly happy being an adjunct professor at some shitty school, but that ain't enough for what I had to give up—

RICHARD

You have no idea what I've—

DIDI

You never had to stare in the fucking mirror changing your whole world—

RICHARD

Going to a good graduate program is hardly a dark night of the soul—

DIDI

For you, or Virgil, or Matt— But my Dad is just as smart as me and he parks cars for a living because everyone thinks he's an idiot. It doesn't matter how hard he works, it's how he's marked. It's how I'm marked. But who do you think told me stories, got me reading, took me to museums—

RICHARD

I hardly think your father's employability is the same as your—

DIDI

It's exactly the fucking same. Why'd LeBlanc get the interview? Because his Dad is rich and they've got the right cultural capital. If I don't get the Rhodes, I'll end up just like Kelli—

RICHARD

Doctor McLean was never on the same path as you, Harvard was never a possibility for her—

DIDI

Well how come your PhD from Oxford has led you to such a pathetic place? I might as well become a fucking secretary.

VIRGIL enters

VIRGIL

I'm sorry, am I interrupting?

RICHARD

Not at all. Miss O'Connor is upset that her Girl Guide program was not enough to get her the Rhodes—

DIDI

It's a fucking good program, getting kids out of the house, giving them shoes—

VIRGIL

Why don't you guide her, Richard, instead of berating her?

DEIRDRE

You're on the committee. What did they say about my application?

VIRGIL

Committee comments are private.

DEIRDRE

If I don't get this, everything I've done here will be for nothing. I can barely get straight A's here, and it's nothing close to Harvard, and why? Because I'm not smart? Or because I don't look like a sorority girl, and my professors say I got a chip on my shoulder—

VIRGIL

Deep breaths, Deirdre.

DEIRDRE

Did LeBlanc get it because my service isn't good enough? When I'm tutoring the high school kids in English, I'm trying to get them to think of books as friends; I'm doing the same with the running program, trying to get those poor kids living in double-wides to be friends with nature.

VIRGIL

But why is that enough to go to Oxford?

RICHARD

Clearly it's not.

DEIRDRE

Before I came here, I didn't trust anyone who didn't swear. They didn't seem honest to me. But now I understand there's different ways of being honest. Reading Conrad, I thought I could never be friends with a British imperialist, but Richard helped me see the good side of the British Empire. And if I can work with Doctor Beasley at Oxford on her Russia and England imperialism project, I can show how reading is actually an ethical act and forms our worlds.

VIRGIL

You've of course read Wayne Booth's *The Company We Keep*?

DEIRDRE

No.

VIRGIL
Richard.

RICHARD
It's so out of date.

VIRGIL
If she's comparing books to friends—

RICHARD
Yes, I see, I see. Booth. *Company We Keep*. Read it and we can incorporate its points into your graduate school applications—

DEIRDRE
What about incorporating it into my Rhodes application?

RICHARD
Miss O'Connor, that deadline has passed, and what you turned in, alas, was not chosen—

DEIRDRE
Who's the alternate?

VIRGIL
Alternate?

DEIRDRE
What if LeBlanc has the social skills of an amoeba? You need an alternate.

VIRGIL
We've never had an alternate before.

DEIRDRE
And you haven't won a Rhodes in, what, decades? What's stopping you from recommending an alternate to the rest of the members?

A moment.

VIRGIL
The Company We Keep is quite readable; perhaps five hundred pages? Read it tonight, incorporate it into your Rhodes application, send it to me by 9am, and, if it seems worthwhile, I'll speak to Quincy about the possibility of an alternate.

Scene 4:
DEIRDRE, MATT, and KELLI sit with forties.

KELLI
To my favorite fancy fellowship nominees!

I'm only an alternate.

DEIRDRE

You'll convince Quincy.

MATT

To our porch couch!

KELLI

You think I know enough table manners to get through a dinner and cocktail party at Quincy's? Cosgrave gave me a damn book explaining what to do when there's, like, four forks.

DEIRDRE

Porch couch!

KELLI

And you think my accent can fool Quincy? She's from fucking Boston.

DEIRDRE

Porch couch!

KELLI

We have a good backup plan if we don't both get in.

MATT

Oh, Matt. If she don't get in, she's going to end up like me.

KELLI

Not if she goes to Harvard.

MATT

Tenure-track appointments rose by less than 1 percent this year, and about fifty thousand people got PhDs. You think I don't read the Chronicle or keep up to date, or do you just think I'm an idiot that can't possibly get a—

KELLI

Porch couch!

DEIRDRE

Porch fucking couch!

KELLI

DEIRDRE and KELLI clink bottles. Enter MR. and MRS. O'CONNOR carrying old suitcases.

Oh, good, you's home!

MR. O'CONNOR

Dad? DEIRDRE

Is that beer? It's only three. MRS. O'CONNOR

You got another one of those? MR. O'CONNOR

There's some Batty Blue in the house. DEIRDRE

That's a fucking hard drive. MR. O'CONNOR

You want me to show you where the fridge is? KELLI

You don't got the icebox somewhere's besides the kitchen, do you? MR. O'CONNOR

MR. O'CONNOR exits.

What are you doing here? DEIRDRE

It's Family Weekend, ain't it? MRS. O'CONNOR

But you didn't even call— DEIRDRE

You must be Kelli. MRS. O'CONNOR

I must be. KELLI

And who's this? MRS. O'CONNOR

This is my boyfriend, Ma. DEIRDRE

He ain't broke up with you yet? MRS. O'CONNOR

MATT

It's great to finally meet you, Mrs. O'Connor. I'm Matt Cohen.

MRS. O'CONNOR

So nice to meet` the boy that can't visit us over breaks even though he's just up in Wellesley.

MATT

I kept telling Deirdre I could just take the T down.

MRS. O'CONNOR

So why didn't you?

DEIRDRE

It just never worked out, Ma.

MR. O'CONNOR enters carrying a beer.

MR. O'CONNOR

Cohen? That Jewish?

MATT

Uh, yes, sir.

MR. O'CONNOR

Well, at least she ain't a lesbian. Where should we put our bags?

DEIRDRE

Back in the car. I can probably get you an employee discount at the Inn—

MR. O'CONNOR

Nah. The Inn's full. So's everywhere, according to them. Family Weekend fills up, I guess.

KELLI

They can stay with us—

DEIRDRE

Where?

MRS. O'CONNOR

We brought an air mattress; we ain't morons.

DEIRDRE

You can't sleep on an— Just have my room. I'll sleep on the couch.

MR. O'CONNOR

Out here?

DEIRDRE

The indoor couch.

KELLI

What about Matt?

DIDI

Well, it ain't like he ever stays the night, right?

MATT

If you guys want to see my frat house, I can give you a tour, but it's not as impressive as some of them.

MRS. O'CONNOR

We gotta meet your parents sometime over the weekend.

MATT

Um, I'm afraid they're not coming, Mrs. O'Connor.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Why not?

DIDI

Because nobody's parents come after their first year, Ma.

MR. O'CONNOR

Maybe their kids come home over the summer instead of breaking their old man's heart.

DIDI

You know I gotta work, Dad—

MR. O'CONNOR

We just thought you might of wanted to see your sister.

DIDI

The rent don't pay itself, does it? I couldn't just—

MR. O'CONNOR

Pegs kept asking for you in the delivery room.

MRS. O'CONNOR

You were such a comfort the first time.

DIDI

I was thirteen the first time.

MATT

Your sister had a kid? And you didn't go home?

KELLI

You coulda got time off to help your sister. If you'd mentioned it.

MRS. O'CONNOR

You didn't even tell your friends?

DIDI

It didn't come up.

MRS. O'CONNOR

What the fuck do you's all talk about?

KELLI

All they talk about is work.

MR. O'CONNOR

Anyways, we got news.

DEIRDRE

You could have just called.

MR. O'CONNOR

This ain't phone news. Pegs wants you to be Collin's godmother.

KELLI

That's awesome!

DIDI

You two's put her up to this.

MRS. O'CONNOR

She set up the Christening over Thanksgiving break so you can be there.

MR. O'CONNOR

And we already paid Mother Church her thirty pieces of silver to reserve the date, so—

MRS. O'CONNOR

She misses you.

DIDI

Then why ain't she here?

MRS. O'CONNOR

The little ones get sick when your father drives.

MR. O'CONNOR

They're too fucking sensitive.

KELLI

This is so great, Didi!

MATT

So, what, a godmother gets the kid extra presents on his birthday, or—?

MR. O'CONNOR

She's responsible for the child's soul.

KELLI

Wait until Father Shiner hears this, he'll be so—

DIDI

There ain't no way Pegs wanted me to—

MRS. O'CONNOR

She loves you. She's proud of you. We don't know no one as smart as you's. We know you'll teach Collin better than anyone else could.

MR. O'CONNOR

Even if you didn't come home when he was born.

DIDI

I had to work!

MR. O'CONNOR

Family is worth taking time off for.

DIDI

I ain't just talking about my job, I'm talking about my Rhodes application.

MR. O'CONNOR

Ain't there somet'in' in Boston that would be just as good? Somet'in' closer to Collin?

MRS. O'CONNOR

What about Harvard? I thought you could get a good letter from Dean Quincy—

DEIRDRE

Nothing's as good as a Rhodes, Ma. Only thirty-two people a year get one, and, if I did, no one could say anything about where I came from, or—

MR. O'CONNOR

What do people say about where you come from?

MRS. O'CONNOR

But if you don't get it, you're applying to grad schools in Boston, right?

DIDI

Yeah, Ma, but—

KELLI

It's a tough market out there to get a job teaching college; a Rhodes would guarantee—

MR. O'CONNOR

It would be better if you came back to Boston. For Collin.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Let's just cross that bridge if we get to it.

DEIDRE

You don't think I'll get the Rhodes?

MRS. O'CONNOR

You just said hardly anyone gets it.

DEIRDRE

So you think I just wasted my whole summer—

MR. O'CONNOR

Well, you ain't never got another chance to see your nephew be born.

MRS. O'CONNOR

She had to work. But she'll be there for the Christening. Right, Didi?

DIDI

How could I miss it? I'm the godmother.

KELLI

I'll make sure she works with Father Shiner to get ready for the ceremony.

MR. O'CONNOR

We'll come pick you up.

DEIRDRE

It's, like, next month. You're going to be ready for this drive again?

MR. O'CONNOR

I ain't in my grave yet, am I?

MRS. O'CONNOR

Don't argue with him.

DEIRDRE

I can just get a ride in with Matt and take the T like I always do.

MR. O'CONNOR

Matt, you gonna let me do something nice for my little girl?

MATT

Um, of course.

Scene 5:

DEIRDRE alone onstage. The lights draw in on her as she again looks in the mirror. As she speaks, she changes into the nicest outfit we've seen her in, professional but chic.

DEIRDRE

I sawr a—
Goddamnit. None of that. Not tonight.
I *saw* a dinosaur soaring in the sky.

KELLI enters.

KELLI

Excited?

DEIRDRE

Nervous.

KELLI

Same thing, ain't it? You'll be fucking brilliant. You're a wordsmith!

DEIRDRE

I don't want to fuck up with him right next to me.

KELLI

Matt's going to love you no matter what.

DEIRDRE

I mean Cosgrave.

KELLI

That numbnut will be there?

DEIRDRE

Lots of faculty, sure.

KELLI

Are you putting on that slinky thing for Cosgrave or Matt?

DEIRDRE

It's not slinky, is it?

KELLI

You look great, just make sure you're slinkin' at the right person.

DEIRDRE

God. I look like an idiot. It's slinky?

MATT knocks on the door. He's in a suit.

MATT

Hey, can I come in?

KELLI

You are in.

DEIRDRE

Do I look slinky?

KELLI

Watch out. It's a trick question.

MATT

You look great. You about ready?

DEIRDRE

For Quincy and Virgil's Excellent Adventure? Why not? Ninth inning, walking to the plate.

MATT

More like the eighth. This isn't the last interview if we get through.

KELLI

You guys talk about this stuff all the time. You just get to do it over dinner. No big thing.

DEIRDRE

Just gotta convince Quincy that reading matters more than setting up NGOs in the Amazon to fight Big Oil. Sure. No problem.

MATT

Anyway, before we get going, I got you something.

DEIRDRE

I don't need any more shoes—

MATT holds a turquoise box.

KELLI

Should I leave the room?

MATT

Just open it.

DEIRDRE does so. It's a pearl set.

MATT (cont)

Mom said you should have pearls with a black dress. She, um. Well. I didn't know, so—

DIDI

I got my Nan's cross.

MATT

Right. Cool. Sorry. I just thought, you know—

DEIRDRE

Wait. It's just... No one's bought me jewelry before. But if your mom says this dress needs pearls, then... Kelli, can you put Nan's necklace in my bag? Let's see how the pearls look.

DEIRDRE takes off her Celtic cross and gives it to KELLI who puts it in DEIRDRE's handbag. MATT puts the pearls on, a bit awkwardly.

MATT

Um, should I do the earrings, too?

DEIRDRE

I don't want to be bleeding.

DEIRDRE looks in the mirror, meaning facing straight out into the audience, and puts on the earrings. She stares.

DEIRDRE (cont)

Who the fuck is that?

Scene 6:

DEIRDRE and MATT at the cocktail party. RICHARD enters, dressed in a suit but still looking scruffy; with him is VIRGIL, looking impeccable. RICHARD hands DEIRDRE a drink.

RICHARD

Ah, Miss O'Connor. You look. Um... Lovely necklace. Here's a drink.

VIRGIL

Good God, Richard, it's okay to compliment them. You look ravishing, dear. And so do you, Matt.

MATT

Where'd you get that?

RICHARD

There's a little bar over there. Sorry. Only have two hands.

VIRGIL

I would have brought you one, dear boy, but I didn't realize you needed anything.

DEIRDRE

There's no booze in this.

RICHARD

Tonic water with lime is your cocktail of the evening. You do not drink at these interviews, but you pretend you are confident enough to do so.

DEIRDRE

I didn't get any food, either, with Quincy grilling me through dinner.

VIRGIL

They want to make sure you know which fork to use and how to speak. They assume you can eat.

DEIRDRE

What a waste of five courses.

RICHARD

I'll buy you dinner after.

MATT

We have plans, actually.

RICHARD

Of course.

DEIRDRE

The four of us could grab something on the way—

QUINCY enters.

QUINCY

What a nice meal, wasn't it?

DEIRDRE

Delicious.

MATT

One of the best I've had, Dean Quincy.

QUINCY

Well, I don't know about that. Virgil said what you're working on is fascinating, I thought I'd—
But, Matt, are you not drinking?

MATT

Just hadn't made it to the bar yet.

QUINCY

Please, please. By all means. We'll wait here for you.

MATT

Excuse me, all.

MATT exits.

QUINCY

Deirdre here has nothing but compliments for you, Richard.

RICHARD

She should after all the time that I put—

QUINCY

She says if she gets the candidacy over LeBlanc, she owes it all to you.

VIRGIL

Richard provides dedicated instruction to all his students, as much as any full-time professor.

RICHARD

More than a lot of the professors who—

VIRGIL

On the first day of class three years ago, he said Deirdre was the most amazing student he'd ever met.

QUINCY

Extraordinary. But there's one thing I still don't understand, Deirdre.

MATT returns with red wine.

QUINCY (cont)

Oh, is that the pinot noir, Matt?

MATT

I couldn't resist; it's an Oregon vintage my parents buy for special occasions.

QUINCY

It has an extremely earthy flavor doesn't it?

MATT

I love the hint of cherries.

DEIRDRE

I had a taste with dinner; quite lovely. Was there an aspect of my project you wanted me to clear up, Dean Quincy?

QUINCY

Just one little thing. Obviously I understand the necessity of the humanities to create a well-rounded student, but when you claim that literature shapes our view of the world, isn't that, well, a bit hyperbolic? When compared, say, to protecting people in the Amazon from oil companies? Or even Matt's project about ...? What did Virgil tell me about your project, Matt?

MATT

Well, the idea is, we're trying to discover methods of mitochondrial DNA analysis that can produce identifications based on smaller samples. For instance, with the methods we hope to create, currently unidentified remains from the Holocaust could be identified.

QUINCY

And this is possible?

MATT

Absolutely. The samples exist; they're simply too small for present techniques. Working at Cambridge would give me the chance to really work on finding the technique.

QUINCY

It's amazing, isn't it?

DEIRDRE

Absolutely.

QUINCY

So I hear Matt telling me he could help families from the Holocaust know where their loved ones rest, and you telling me that literature shapes our view of the world. It just doesn't seem—

DEIRDRE

Let me stop you right there.

VIRGIL

Deirdre—

DEIRDRE

What's the first thing you see when you think of the Holocaust, Dean Quincy?

QUINCY

I don't really—

DEIRDRE

Just say the first thing that pops into your mind.

QUINCY

I suppose it's that scene from *Schindler's List* when the children hide in the latrine.

DEIRDRE

So when you say Matt's work could be helpful to the relatives of those that suffered through the Holocaust, you're thinking of those children in the latrine?

QUINCY

I suppose so.

DEIRDRE

So, for all Matt's brilliant work—and it is brilliant—its importance has to be told in narrative.

QUINCY

But is that shaping my world view, or merely informing it?

DEIRDRE

What if I told you the film left a lacuna about homosexuals killed by Nazis?

VIRGIL

It's hard to think of that situation being fair to anyone—

QUINCY

Are you saying the Holocaust is not about Jews?

DEIRDRE

Of course not. I'm saying a different filmmaker could have focused on the plight of homosexuals, and that your concept of the event is shaped by the art. Given that narrative *does* shape our world, it seems worth studying to me. Far more so than NGOs in the Amazon; you wouldn't even think oil companies were treating citizens badly without anti-imperialist literature.

QUINCY

I thought you decided imperialism was acceptable, at least when it's Conrad?

DEIRDRE

I think I would say, "Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly."

QUINCY

You would quote Bobby Kennedy. He was a friend of the family. And speaking of fighting

poverty, I have good news for you and Matt: Nike sponsors our sports teams, and they'd like to sponsor your running program as well. Not only with shoes, but however they can help.

DEIRDRE

That would be great.

MATT

We couldn't take that.

QUINCY

Why not?

MATT

Nike uses child labor.

QUINCY

I believe they stopped.

MATT

In Pakistan. Making soccer balls.

DEIRDRE

Part of the program, obviously, is to help combat obesity. We've always wanted to be able to offer some healthy drinks and snacks after, so if Nike gave funding for—

MATT

I'm sorry, it's just not possible—

DEIRDRE

Of course it is—

VIRGIL

It looks like we're both out of wine, son, perhaps we can go to—

QUINCY

In any case, I'm sure the benefits to the local children would outweigh—

MATT

That's why we went with New Balance. There's no blood money there.

DEIRDRE

Well, they've been accused of homosexual civil rights infractions.

MATT

That's not true.

DEIRDRE

And I think this, actually, gets at my interest in imperialism. There's maybe a knee-jerk reaction to write it off as bad, or even evil, but Bill Warren suggests that imperialism is the pioneer of

capitalism; that imperialism can, in fact, be a progressive force, as in India where it destroyed a monarchy which was eventually replaced with a self-ruling democracy—

MATT

What does this have to do with child labor in Pak—

DEIRDRE

One can't be too dogmatic when accepting help.

QUINCY

I should mingle. It was nice talking to you both.

Scene 7:

MATT, DEIRDRE and KELLI in the Shanty.

MATT

You kinda threw me under the bus there, didn't you?

DEIRDRE

You walked right in front of it.

MATT

Well, you didn't stop me.

DEIRDRE

I have to hold your hand when you cross the street?

KELLI

It went well, then?

DEIRDRE

Quincy questioned the relevance of my discipline then Matt got political.

MATT

You think we should take that money?

KELLI

What money?

DEIRDRE

I guess Nike offered to sponsor our stupid running program instead of New Balance—

MATT

Which does not support anti-gay—

DEIRDRE

Oh, go look it up. You're willing to take money from the U.S. government and you think you can hold your nose up at a shoe company?

MATT

There's nothing about public funding of academic research that is—

DEIRDRE

Do you even know who Cecil Rhodes is, what he did in South Africa? If I'm willing to take his money, I'm willing to take—

MATT

You told Quincy British imperialism was good for India—

DEIRDRE

At an interview.

MATT

You're willing to lie to—

DEIRDRE

I think democracy and self-rule are good things. I left out some other thoughts. A sin of omission.

MATT

I'm going home.

DEIRDRE

I drove us here because you had too much wine. Maybe if you'd stayed sober—

KELLI

Just stay here, Matt. Don't do anything stupid. Let's finish up the whiskey. None of us should be sober.

DEIRDRE

Most people say X, but I say Y. It's how the humanities work, Matt.

MATT

In the sciences we prefer truth.

Scene 8:

MATT, KELLI, and DEIRDRE sprawl across the Shanty in poses of passed out. QUINCY enters a different space and sits, taking out her phone. She dials. DEIRDRE's phone rings.

Uh. That's not mine. KELLI

Mine's off. MATT

Deirdre. Deirdre, your phone. Deirdre! KELLI

DIDI speaks South Boston.

What's wrong? DIDI

Your phone. KELLI

Oh, fuck. What time is it? DIDI

3am. KELLI

DIDI gets to her phone.

Ma? You's guys okay? DIDI

Sorry to bother you so early in the morning, but this is your 3am interview. QUINCY

Sorry? DIDI

Is this Deirdre O'Connor? QUINCY

Yeah? DIDI

This is Dean Quincy. I have a few final questions for you. QUINCY

DEIRDRE tries to control her accent.

Oh. Okay. DEIRDRE

KELLI
Is everything okay?

DEIRDRE
(covering phone) It's Quincy.

MATT
What?

QUINCY
Was that someone else on the phone?

DEIRDRE
No, it's just. Um. I was asleep.

QUINCY
Of course. Just a few questions, and I'll let you get back to bed.

MATT
What's she want?

DEIRDRE
(covering phone) Kelli, coffee.

KELLI runs offstage.

QUINCY
The first question was offered by Professor Porter: he was very impressed with your project and your poise, but he wondered: In your search for ethical criticism, as you call it, can you respect the relativism of the individual reader and still offer knowledge about why some readings are worth more than others?

KELLI runs back onstage.

KELLI
There was some in the pot. I nuked it.

DEIRDRE
Um. Absolutely. Professor Porter's question is extremely relevant, but, um, clearly some readers... um. Are better than others?

QUINCY
You haven't answered the question. Why are some readings worth more?

DEIRDRE
Well, say someone read *Heart of Darkness* once in high school—does she have the same knowledge as someone who studied it for thirty years? Of course not. It's absurd.

QUINCY

That's an interesting segue into Professor Mach's question: She wanted to know if such knowledge is possible, why do so many valid but differing opinions about texts exist?

DEIRDRE

Let me use an example; experts reading *Heart of Darkness* in 1903 were likely to be light-skinned men in Britain. Achebe, a later expert, was a dark-skinned man from Africa who read the text in the U.S. in the 1970s. Both experts can contribute knowledge about the text, but each encounter with the text shifts our views, not only of the novella, but also of the world.

QUINCY

Well. That will be all for now. Sorry for waking you.

DEIRDRE

It's always a (South Boston) pleasure— (American Standard) pleasure. To speak on my topic, Dean Quincy.

QUINCY

You'll want to work on controlling that accent at 3am as well as you did at the party. Good night.

DEIRDRE

Good night.

They hang up. QUINCY exits.

DIDI

Fuck!

MATT

What the hell was that?

DIDI

Some final fucky fuck.

MATT

Should I turn my phone on?

DIDI

You know's as much as I does.

KELLI

You did great, honey.

DIDI

She said I need to control my fucking accent!

MATT

I don't have any missed calls. Maybe she's calling Rhodes candidates first?

KELLI

You want me to make a new pot of coffee?

DIDI

I totally fucked this up.

Scene 9:

DEIRDRE, MATT and KELLI sit in the living room. All have coffee. All are exhausted. MATT and DEIRDRE stare at their phones.

DEIRDRE

I'm callin' him.

KELLI

I don't think that's a good idea.

MATT

Do you think she called while my phone was off?

DEIRDRE

What time is it?

KELLI

Seven.

DEIRDRE

People are up by seven.

KELLI

You never are.

DEIRDRE

I am today. I'm callin' him.

DEIRDRE dials. A phone rings. RICHARD enters dressed for bed and answers.

RICHARD

(his accent slipping a bit) 'ello?

DEIRDRE

I'm sorry, I didn't wake you, did I?

RICHARD

(his accent still slipping) 'oo is this?

DEIRDRE

Deirdre O'Connor— I'm sorry, is this—

RICHARD

(RP UK) Oh. Miss O'Connor. Of course. How did you get my telephone number?

DEIRDRE

It's on your CV. Which is online. I'm sorry, did I wake you?

RICHARD

No. No. Is something the matter?

DEIRDRE

I don't know. Quincy called me. At 3am.

RICHARD

Oh, God.

DEIRDRE

Is that bad?

RICHARD

No, it's quite good, I just didn't realize—

DEIRDRE

How's it good?

RICHARD

She must be doing 3am interviews for the finalists; I didn't know or I would have—

DEIRDRE

Don't you think you could have mentioned—

RICHARD

How did it go?

DEIRDRE

I talked normal.

RICHARD

What do you mean?

DIDI

I'd just woked up, so's I talked normal. She told me to control my accent.

RICHARD

Oh, dear.

DEIRDRE

I stopped when I realized it was her, but I thought it was my Ma, that something happened—

RICHARD

Have you sent a thank you e-mail yet?

DEIRDRE

For what?

RICHARD

For the party! For inviting you to her house! For allowing you to be an alternate, you nitwit!

DEIRDRE

I didn't realize I was supposed to.

RICHARD

Always send a thank you after an interview. Do so now. Fix the situation.

DEIRDRE

I could say we've worked extensively on neutralizing my accent?

RICHARD

But our work obviously didn't succeed in—

DEIRDRE

I thought it was my Ma—

RICHARD

So?

DEIRDRE

My Ma doesn't approve of my new accent?

RICHARD

That implies your parents won't support you during a fellowship to Oxford—

DEIRDRE

They won't!

RICHARD

It doesn't matter. Maybe you don't need to say anything at all, just a thank you—

DEIRDRE

I'll just thank her and tell her the truth. My accent is under control, I was just startled by the phone call, afraid it was bad family news.

RICHARD

Whatever you think best. However, craft it carefully. Send it by 9am. They won't make a

decision before then. They're probably all asleep now. I'll stay up and be online if you want me to look at a draft.

DEIRDRE

Thank you, Professor Cosgrave.

RICHARD

And Miss O'Connor?

DEIRDRE

Yes?

RICHARD

Never call at this hour again.

Scene 10:

DEIRDRE has a suitcase. She stands with MATT and KELLI outside the Shanty.

MATT

You said you wouldn't go if I didn't get the Marshall.

DEIRDRE

I don't have the Rhodes yet.

MATT

But if you're not going to take it, why go to the interview?

DEIRDRE

Can we talk about this in the car?

MATT

I don't know if I can take you to New York.

DEIRDRE

Because you didn't get the Marshall?

MATT

Dr. Steinman says I'm a sure thing at MIT. With Quincy's letter I'm sure you'll get into Harvard—

KELLI

A bird in the hand, Matt.

DEIRDRE

I gotta get it.

MATT

And, what, we'll see each other a couple times a year?

DEIRDRE

Not even that. I can't afford to fly back and forth. Once I'm there, I'm there. Two years.

MATT

Not even for Christmas?

KELLI

You don't get it.

MATT

Stay out of this.

KELLI

Why do you think I've never been to Europe, Matt? Because I don't want to travel?

MATT

Look, okay, you two are working class or whatever, but so am I—

DEIRDRE

Oh, God! I am so sick of this bullshit! You're working class cause your Dad's a consultant and your Mom's a shrink; Libby is working class cause her Dad's the president of a university; and Allen's working class because his parents only own a half-million dollar house in Aspen and they have to live there all year round—

MATT

Okay, you win the persecution dick measuring—

DEIRDRE

It's fucking insulting to what I've had to give up—

KELLI

Just give her a ride—

MATT

But we can just go back to Boston—

KELLI

You want her to end up like me, Matt?

MATT

A PhD from Harvard doesn't have to wait tables, even if it is in English.

KELLI

And what if she don't get into Harvard? She's got to grab the opportunity in front of—

MATT

You're too scared to grab any opportunity that comes near—

KELLI

I grabbed the fucking opportunity and all it got me was loans I can't pay off, and now I watch alumni from my undergraduate alma mater who ain't half as smart as me make killings at their daddies' banks in New York—

DEIRDRE

Let's just get in the car—

KELLI

Cosgrave wouldn't even work with me. I ain't never seen him help nobody. Deirdre's special, you gotta drive her—

DEIRDRE

Just give me a ride to Boston, Matt, I can get a bus from—

KELLI

They hear us talk and think we're backwards, that we got a chip on our shoulder—

MATT

You do!

DEIRDRE

Kelli, this isn't helping.

MATT

If you two are so hard up, why don't you have some class solidarity, Kelli can give you a ride—

KELLI

I can't miss work.

DEIRDRE

You're driving to Boston anyway.

MATT

Wellesley, actually.

KELLI

Don't be such a jerk.

MATT

I should take the pearls back, too.

DEIRDRE

They're part of my interview outfit.

MATT

And I hope you fall on your face.

DIDI

You already fell, me boy, but someone's gotta come in last, right?

MR. and MRS. O'CONNOR enter.

MR. O'CONNOR

Hey, Matt.

MATT

I hope you've still got a room set up for her.

MATT exits.

DIDI

What are you's guys doing here?

MRS. O'CONNOR

We's picking you up for Thanksgiving.

MR. O'CONNOR

You moving back in?

DEIRDRE

I told you, I can't come home for Thanksgiving, I've got this interview—

MR. O'CONNOR

You ain't missing Collin's Christening.

MRS. O'CONNOR

You can't be his godmother if you ain't there.

DEIRDRE

I have an interview! I told you to reschedule it!

MRS. O'CONNOR

The church schedule is full and we already paid the deposit, we can't just—

KELLI

Wait— You're going to miss your nephew's Christening for an interview?

DIDI

It's for the fucking Rhodes!

KELLI

You think people like Matt will ever accept you, even with a masters from Oxford?

DIDI

You just said I'd end up like you without it!

KELLI

Well maybe that ain't so bad.

RICHARD and VIRGIL enter.

VIRGIL

Ah, Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor! I see Deirdre's getting quite the send off.

RICHARD

We just came by to say good luck. Hello, Doctor McLean.

KELLI

Your voice got to her real good, didn't it? I gotta go to work.

KELLI exits.

DEIRDRE

Dad, can you just drive me to the bus station in Boston?

MR. O'CONNOR

We're here to pick you up for Thanksgiving, not to give you a ride to some fucking bus.

RICHARD

I thought Matt was giving you a ride to New York?

DEIRDRE

Not now.

RICHARD

Well, surely the Rhodes will cover transportation costs—

DIDI

It ain't about costs; there ain't no way to get from this fucking village to New York without a car.

MR. O'CONNOR

Forget it. She's coming home for Thanksgiving.

RICHARD

After her interview.

MRS. O'CONNOR

She's not missing the Christening.

RICHARD

What Christening?

DEIRDRE

My nephew's Christening is on the same day as my interview—

VIRGIL

Surely the Christening can be rescheduled—

MRS. O'CONNOR

That ain't how it works.

MR. O'CONNOR

You're the godmother, and you're going to be there.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Why would they put an interview over a holiday when you're supposed to be with family?

VIRGIL

The profession often isn't very conscientious of family—

RICHARD

The big English conference is always a couple days after Christmas.

MR. O'CONNOR

They want you to work over Christmas?

DEIRDRE

Work is what teaches you about yourself—

MR. O'CONNOR

And part of that is knowing when to put family first.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Why do you want to be part of somet'in' that don't even respect family?

DEIRDRE

You two are driving back to Boston anyway, just drop me off at the bus station, and I'll try to get home for a few days after the inter—

MRS. O'CONNOR

The Christening is tomorrow.

DIDI

Well I can't go home tomorrow!

MRS. O'CONNOR

You are not abandoning a wee one's soul!

DEIRDRE

Why doesn't one of Useless's sisters be the godmother?

MRS. O'CONNOR

Because Pegs wants it to be you!

MR. O'CONNOR

You ain't going to England. Not to learn to turn your back on your own godson.

VIRGIL

It's the opportunity of a lifetime, Mr.—

MR. O'CONNOR

No one at Oxford's gonna love her like family.

DEIRDRE

Can you give me a ride, Virgil?

VIRGIL

I'm afraid my eyes aren't what they used to be; I'm not supposed to drive after dark—

MRS. O'CONNOR

Don't you want to be Collin's godmother no more?

DEIRDRE

Why can't we just reschedule it, Ma?

MRS. O'CONNOR

'Cause we're on the books and we've already waited longer than we should have so you could—

RICHARD

Perhaps another Church would have—

MR. O'CONNOR

You don't Christen your child outside your Parish. You'd know that if you didn't grow up an Anglican Devil of Canterbury—

RICHARD

There is no Papal law stating that a child must be Christened in its home Parish, and this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for Miss O'Connor to—

MRS. O'CONNOR

Being her nephew's godmother is a once in a lifetime—

DEIRDRE

Can I borrow your car?

VIRGIL

I'm afraid the insurance of lending to a student—

DEIRDRE

Could Professor Cosgrave borrow it?

RICHARD

I'm not sure it would be quite above board driving a student—

DEIRDRE

Why won't anybody help me?

MR. O'CONNOR

Gimme your bag, Didi.

VIRGIL

Richard, after Bill got cancer... I only regret what I didn't do.

MR. O'CONNOR

You think this Proddy dog bastard loves you? He don't understand a thing about you.

MRS. O'CONNOR

If you reject an innocent child, you ain't no light on the hill, Didi.

DEIRDRE

Richard, please. I've done everything you asked me to.

MR. O'CONNOR

You don't got no fucking right to take my little girl, Doc. She belongs to me.

RICHARD

May I have the keys, please, Virgil?

VIRGIL gives RICHARD his car keys.

RICHARD (cont)

Put your bag in the car, Miss O'Connor.

MR. O'CONNOR

If you go with him, don't bother coming home for Thanksgiving. Or Christmas, neither. Hell, don't come home at all no more.

MRS. O'CONNOR

You cried for days when you couldn't be Molly's godmother, how can you not come home—?

MR. O'CONNOR

You hear me? Gimme your bags. Now.

DIDI

I may have turned to the wilderness, Ma, but at least I got my choice a nightmares. Give Nan's necklace to Collin. He deserves it more than me.

DIDI takes the Celtic cross out of her purse.
She hands it to her mother.

RICHARD

I trust you can walk home from here?

VIRGIL

Go.

RICHARD and DEIRDRE exit.

MRS. O'CONNOR

Didi!

MR. O'CONNOR

No one will love you like me! No one!

MRS. O'CONNOR

Didi, come back! Didi!

MR. O'CONNOR

Don't you cry over my grave, Didi! You hear me?! Don't you cry over my grave!

Scene 11:

DEIRDRE enters a hotel room, RICHARD close behind. He leaves the door just open.

RICHARD

All right, we're out of the lobby, but in a hotel like this no one is eavesdropping—

DEIRDRE

Can we close the door?

RICHARD

Not with us alone in your room. No one's listening. Just tell me what went so wrong at the interview.

DEIRDRE

Everything, it was horrible.

RICHARD

Well, at least you made it this far, no one would have thought—

DIDI

Don't fucking comfort me.

RICHARD

What a lovely view your room has. All of the hotel does, but I made sure you got the skyline. Perhaps you'd like a drink on the rooftop bar? And, look, the hotel left a bottle of champagne—

DIDI

I missed my nephew's fuckin' Christening for this, and these fuckin' assholes don't understand anything about—

RICHARD

What did you expect?

DIDI

I ain't nothin' like them. I ain't going to Oxford.

RICHARD

I'm sure you did wonderfully, but all the candidates at this level are extraordinarily—

DIDI

They asked what my biggest regret was, and I said that I had to break my family's rules to be here. This fuckin' useless interviewer said his dad never forgave him for being a philosopher rather than a lawyer. Yeah. It's just fuckin' like that.

RICHARD

You must suffer fools more gladly.

DEIRDRE

They said it didn't seem like I needed to do my work at Oxford, that I could—

RICHARD

But we went over how to answer that in the car.

DEIRDRE

And I answered fine. I said that the only professor looking at how the Russian Empire influenced British writing is Professor Beasley at Oxford, but they just questioned my reading of the book.

RICHARD

That should be no problem after the year you've spent—

DEIRDRE

Oh, I convinced them. I even convinced the scientist. I told them that only someone who both suffered and benefited from imperialism could write the book. That Marlowe didn't lie to Kurtz's fiancée at the end. That Marlowe is *conflating* Kurtz's last words, "The horror, the horror" with Kurtz's beloved. That Marlowe isn't saying the horror is Africa, but the pale sepulchral Europe that Kurtz's beloved represents. That the heart of darkness isn't Africa but anywhere imperialists benefit. That only a Polish man whose parents were killed by Russian

imperialists and then benefited from British empire could understand that the heart of darkness is where the beneficiaries sit.

RICHARD

Well. Perhaps they didn't want to understand that their own lives benefit from imperialism—

DIDI

They didn't understand a God damn thing I said. But they were convinced.

RICHARD

Of what?

DEIRDRE

They loved me saying Conrad was a post-colonial writer of the Russian Empire, not a British imperialist, and agreed that I had to work with Professor Beasley at Oxford. Most people think X, but actually Y.

RICHARD

Wait, you got it?

DIDI

Then I called home. And Ma hung up on me.

RICHARD

Miss O'Connor! Congratulations! What wonderful news!

DIDI

I skipped my nephew's Christening to be here, to sit with those assholes who don't understand a God damn thing about me—

RICHARD

Let's have a celebratory drink— The champagne! How did the hotel know—

DIDI

I ain't accepting it.

RICHARD

People don't reject the Rhodes—

DIDI

Maybe if I go home and apologize—

RICHARD

Your family will be proud eventually—

DEIRDRE

You don't understand what skipping a Christening means—

RICHARD

Let's have a drink—

DEIRDRE

So I take this and I'll be able to do anything I want, get any job, whatever, except if I try to go home I'll seem condescending whether I am or not— And maybe I will be condescending. Maybe I won't ever be able to look at them the same—

RICHARD

After all these years of me working to get you here, you can sit there and suggest you won't—

DEIRDRE

There it is! The truth! This isn't about giving me your voice— You could care less if I'm at Oxford or Bunker Hill Community College, it's all about you getting tenure—

RICHARD

You're right, absolutely, I don't give a damn about you. I drove you to New York and put you up in this hotel—

DEIRDRE

The Rhodes committee's paying for my room—

RICHARD

And my extravagant salary from my cushy job is covering my room—

DEIRDRE

It's a down payment on tenure—

RICHARD

After which, as your parents say, my life is easy, requiring no work—

DEIRDRE

Just mock me, like you always do, and I'll call my Dad's cell and tell him, "Hey, Dad, I know I missed the Christening and rejected being my nephew's godmother, but I'm going to Britain's finest university." He won't even answer the phone.

RICHARD

How do you know?

DIDI

Because I fuckin' called him six times since the interview! I ain't losin' my family over this.

DICKIE

I haven't seen me Da since I was your age.

DIDI

I ain't ending up some pathetic, lonely Visiting Professor like you.

DICKIE

I left school when I was sixteen to apprentice to me Da in a machine shop in Dublin—

DEIRDRE

Dublin?

RICHARD

That's right. I worked there for two years before I went to an FE college to take my A levels—

DEIRDRE

You don't sound like you're from Dublin.

DICKIE

Close the door.

DEIRDRE

Maybe we should go have that drink—

DICKIE

I said close the door.

DEIRDRE does so. RICHARD speaks with a working class Dublin accent.

DICKIE (cont)

I'll take it as a particular compliment that you couldn't tell. You know better than anyone how many hours it takes to—

DEIRDRE

Stop.

DICKIE

(Dublin) There's somet'in' about the consonants that grate like metal against metal—

DEIRDRE

Don't make fun of me.

DICKIE

(Dublin) It's fuckin' deafenin' on the shop floor, the crash, clang, bang. Me Da watched the first hour, saw me blood mix with the white coolant dribbling out the machine. "Good job, Dickie," he said. But after two years of mockery when I read during me breaks, I went to FE, did my A levels, and got into fucking Oxford. Me Da said, "You's going to England? To read books? I'm trying to see why you'd betray your country for books, Dickie, but I can't get me head that far up me arse." I told meself I weren't never coming home. And I haven't. So don't take your bloody Rhodes, if ya don't wanna. But I'll know exactly what a coward you are. Exactly.

DEIRDRE

But you hate my Irish background.

RICHARD

(RP UK) I hate mine, why shouldn't I hate yours? It's no reason not to take the Rhodes.

DEIRDRE

But they said the Rhodes doesn't pay for the flight to England, or room and board until school starts—

RICHARD

Oh my God. Is it really coming down to such mundane excuses to hide in some corner of the colonies? If that's all it takes, I'll write you a check for—

RICHARD has taken out his checkbook and is writing.

DEIRDRE

No—

RICHARD

A couple thousand for plane fare and maybe a thousand to live on while you settle in Oxford before school—

DEIRDRE

I can't take—

RICHARD

I'll call an old friend of mine who lets rooms and—

DEIRDRE

Richard I can't—

RICHARD

You can and you will.

RICHARD is holding out the check.

DEIRDRE

I can't pay you back.

RICHARD

You think I made it here without help?

DEIRDRE

I have to give you something.

RICHARD

In the future, when a student of yours needs assistance, you'll give it to her.

DEIRDRE

Will you come visit me? You're the only person I have left.

DEIRDRE takes the check and hugs
RICHARD.

RICHARD

All right, I understand you're grateful Miss O'Connor.

DEIRDRE

You don't have to sleep down the hall tonight.

RICHARD

I'll treat that like a joke, and—

DEIRDRE

Richard. You don't have to leave tonight.

RICHARD

Of course I do.

DEIRDRE

You'll regret it if you don't stay.

RICHARD

Absolutely. And you'll look back at me with fondness, or as that pathetic, lonely professor. You decide, Deirdre.

A moment.

DEIRDRE

Can we at least have a drink?

RICHARD

Of course. How about the champagne— Oh. It's from the Rhodes Committee congratulating you. The benefits of siding with the imperialists begin. For you, a quote:

RICHARD continues speaking as he opens
the champagne and pours the glasses:

DICKIE (cont)

(Dublin) "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."

DEIRDRE

I thought you hated Joyce.

RICHARD

I never said that.

DEIRDRE

You wouldn't let me write about him.

RICHARD

Never write about something you love. They'll sniff it out and use their bloody jaws to destroy any vulnerable part of you. That's why you and I can never write about home.

RICHARD hands DEIRDRE a glass of champagne and raises his in a toast.

RICHARD (cont)

To Cecil Rhodes, Imperialist Extraordinaire.

DEIRDRE

To living in the heart of darkness, and loved ones left behind.

RICHARD

To living in the heart of darkness, and loved ones left behind.

They clink glasses and drink.

Darkness.

END OF PLAY